

School of Oriental and African Studies
Cambridge University Press

The Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Strengthening National Human Rights Structures and Institutions

Source: *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1995), pp. 234-236

Published by: [School of Oriental and African Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/745645>

Accessed: 28-10-2015 23:44 UTC

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON STRENGTHENING NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

In September 1994 representatives from national parliaments in 33 African states attended the 92nd Inter-Parliamentary Conference.¹ The following resolution was adopted unanimously by the conference and is significant in that it sets out a series of strategies which, if implemented, will go a long way towards the strengthening of human rights in practice.

Strengthening National Structures, Institutions and Organizations of Society Which Play A Role in Promoting and Safeguarding Human Rights

The 92nd Inter-Parliamentary Conference:

1. *Stresses* the importance of universal ratification of the international instruments relating to human rights, and *calls on* those States which have not done so, to ratify them as soon as possible, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
2. *Strongly urges* States to enact national legislation incorporating the standards embodied in international human rights instruments and to create general conditions conducive to the promotion and protection of human rights, including minority rights, and sustained development;
3. *Calls on* parliaments to harmonize existing national legislation with international human rights instruments;
4. *Also calls on* all States to condemn all acts, especially terrorist acts, sponsored by any State, group or person resulting in the destruction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to support the proposal for the setting up of an International Criminal Court to prosecute and try those accused of such acts;
5. *Recalls* the resolution adopted by the 85th Inter-Parliamentary Conference on "Policies to put an end to violence against women and children", and *urges* parliaments to facilitate implementation of UN instruments, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 1993, relating to victims of crime, abuse of power, torture and violence against women and children, paying special attention to provisions on the rehabilitation of victims and their access to compensation;
6. *Calls on* all States to co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights;
7. *Reaffirms* the importance of creating or strengthening, in accordance with national legislation, national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights and of ensuring the pluralism of their membership and their independence;
8. *Recognizes* that it is the right of each State, in creating such institutions, to

¹ These were: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

- choose the framework best suited to its particular needs;
9. *Encourages* State-established national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights to prevent and combat all violations of human rights as enumerated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and relevant international instruments;
 10. *Calls on* States to honour the "Principles relating to the status of national institutions" to ensure in particular, that these institutions are:
 - (a) independent of Government;
 - (b) provided with adequate funding;
 - (c) pluralistic and represent those in society involved in the promotion and protection of human rights;
 - (d) empowered to comment on the human rights performance of their government; and
 - (e) active in human rights education;
 11. *Requests* States to grant, within the limits of legislation and established procedure, resources to national institutions so that they may contribute appropriately to legislative activity and to the drafting of reports to be submitted to relevant UN treaty bodies;
 12. *Calls on* States to take appropriate steps to promote the exchange of information and experience concerning the establishment and operation of national institutions;
 13. *Also calls on* parliaments to establish mechanisms for examining and responding to reports prepared by national human rights institutions;
 14. *Renews its appeal* to States to spare no effort in drawing up and implementing effective legal and other procedures and mechanisms which guarantee better application of international human rights provisions, particularly in the field of administration of justice;
 15. *Calls on* all States to respect the political rights of opposition parties and the freedom of the media;
 16. *Also calls on* all States to ensure that the various national structures, institutions and organizations, including the Judiciary, public prosecutors, police and the armed forces, prison personnel and all responsible agencies are instructed regarding all aspects of their duties and responsibilities deriving from the UN Human Rights Covenants;
 17. *Recognizes* that under the rule of law the police and prosecuting authorities are to be regarded as essential guarantors of an individual's human rights and thus discourage extrajudicial action by aggrieved citizens;
 18. *Requests* States to support information and public awareness programmes for the teaching, promotion and understanding of human rights, in order to combat all forms of discrimination;
 19. *Calls on* parliaments to recognize the important and constructive role that non-governmental organizations can play in conjunction with national institutions, and to support their efforts in order to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights;
 20. *Recommends* that the United Nations Secretary-General give priority to requests for assistance submitted by States in establishing or strengthening national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, as part of the Programme of Advisory Services and Technical Assistance in the Field of Human Rights;
 21. *Recommends further* that the UN Secretary-General establish, as soon as possible, a Voluntary Fund for National Institutions, in accordance with the

- financial rules of the UN, this fund to be managed by a board of directors comprising appropriate representation of the national institutions;
22. *Urges* strengthening the role of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Advisory Services and Technical Assistance in the Field of Human Rights as well as the UNESCO Voluntary Fund for the Development of Awareness on Human Rights through Education and Information, so that governments which so request may obtain assistance for education, information and documentation projects, including those of non-governmental organizations;
 23. *Reiterates* that parliamentary activity as a whole, which covers the entire spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, aims at guaranteeing human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 24. *Reaffirms* that parliamentary democracy can only have real meaning insofar as women are represented in parliament on the basis of strict equality with men in both law and practice, and *strongly urges* parliaments to promote the Plan of Action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council on 26 March 1994;
 25. *Affirms* that parliamentary activities in support of human rights can be enhanced through parliamentary committees or sub-committees with a mandate to ensure that human rights are promoted and respected, and *urges* parliaments to establish such bodies where they do not yet exist and to use the IPU publication "World Directory of Parliamentary Human Rights Bodies" to facilitate contacts and exchange among them;
 26. *Reiterates* its support for the different human rights activities carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in particular its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and *urges* all National Groups to strengthen their support for the work of this body, in particular by taking the measures recommended by the Inter-Parliamentary Council in its resolution on the Results and Follow-up of the Inter-Parliamentary Symposium on "Parliament: Guardian of Human Rights".