

# ARAB PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN

Quarterly newsletter published by UNDP's Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) with the contribution of Arab parliaments and parliamentarians.

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## EDITORIAL

*This fourth issue of the Arab Parliamentary Bulletin covers the last quarter of 2009 and*

*tackles new and wide-ranging topics related to parliamentary activity in the Arab region. The articles prepared for this issue underline the legislative and oversight functions of Arab parliaments and discuss their effectiveness in light of the varying degrees of independence and freedom of the parliamentary institutions in the Arab countries.*

*In this issue, the article entitled "Access to Information in the Arab World: An Emerging Issue" reviews the latest draft laws on access to information discussed in some Arab parliaments. It focuses on countries that have already promulgated access to information laws, but also on some others that have recently engaged in the process. Laws on freedom of information, if implemented effectively, contribute to guaranteeing transparency and preventing fraudulent practices which perpetuate corruption and hamper accountability and good governance.*

*In a well-appreciated article titled "Block 18... A Success Story", contributed by MP Ali Ashal, Member of the Yemeni parliament, the author recalls a successful experience of the Yemeni parliament in overseeing the government. He also confirms that parliaments can, even in highly sensitive and complex contexts, fulfill their oversight role and defend the interest of their country. This article is clearly a positive model of parliamentary effectiveness, and such examples should contribute to improving the image of Arab parliaments, often perceived as faltering and ineffective.*

*This issue also includes a brief on the presidential and legislative elections held last October in Tunisia, and an article on the amendment of the Iraqi electoral law, under which the March 2010 elections will be organized. The news sections cover recent parliamentary activities at the international, regional and country levels, and recently adopted legislation in our region.*

*In 2010, we will continue to bring to front interesting experiences and share with you news and practices that we hope you will find useful. We will also make sure to keep the Arab Parliamentary Bulletin an open space for exchange and welcome your contributions and suggestions. news briefs, or updates on recent parliamentary events in the region.*

**WE INVITE YOU TO VISIT  
OUR WEBSITE:  
[www.arabparliaments.org](http://www.arabparliaments.org)**

## Arab Parliaments' News

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### **Algeria:**

On 4 November 2009, the National Council organized a parliamentary seminar on "Climate Change and Development Mechanisms". During the workshop, parliamentarians and experts discussed environmental issues such as climate change, water scarcity, development strategies in Algeria, renewable energy, and challenges of the Copenhagen Summit.

### **Lebanon:**

The Lebanese National Assembly organized several workshops during the last quarter of 2009 in cooperation with UNDP as well as other partners.

- In the occasion of the [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), the Assembly organized a [seminar on the draft law for Protection of Women against Domestic Violence](#). The draft law was presented and discussed by MPs as well as representatives of civil society organizations. The seminar also included live testimonies of victims of domestic violence.
- **Lebanese Law of Association 1909: Celebration of the 100 Anniversary:** The workshop organized on December 4th, with the participation of MPs, Judges, and representatives of media and civil society, analyzed the past, present and future of this law. Members of the French Senate participated as well, and presented the French and European legislative framework regulating associations.
- **Human Rights Day at the Lebanese National**

**Assembly:** with the participation of MPs, ministers, ambassadors of foreign countries, and representatives of UN agencies, civil society and media, a meeting titled "Together Toward the National Action Plan for the Human Rights" was organized on December 14th. The meeting provided an opportunity to present the achievements of the initiative, launched in 2005 and implemented by UNDP's project at the parliament, and to renew the commitment of all partner institutions to the national partnership towards the achievement of the national action plan for human rights.

### **Mauritania:**

On 17-18 December 2009, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly organized a training session for parliamentarians on Mauritania's foreign affairs. Participants discussed ties with the European Union, the Cotonou Agreement, the Union of the Arab Maghreb, ties with countries in Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Pan-African Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

### **Occupied Palestinian Territory:**

On the occasion of the International Day of Disabled Persons on 22 December, the Education and Social Affairs Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council organized a [Workshop on the Law for the Disabled](#). Several parliamentarians, ministers, and representatives of NGOs for the disabled took part in the workshop to discuss the Law for the Disabled and obstacles to its

implementation.

The Training and Development Unit of the Palestinian Legislative Council organized a workshop entitled "Establishing a Training Plan in Line with Parliamentary Activities" at the Council's headquarters in Gaza, in the presence of the Secretary General, the Director of the Training and Development Unit, and the directors of different departments. The workshop focused on the importance of providing training for the Council's staff and building their capacities, and highlighted the need for a complete training plan.

### **Sudan**

#### **Parliamentary Workshop on Intellectual Property to Protect Scientific Research.**

On 19 October 2009, the Physical Education, Instruction, and Scientific Affairs Committee of the Sudanese National Assembly, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Technology, organized a workshop on intellectual property to protect scientific research. During the workshop, participants examined intellectual property legislations contributing to the development of scientific research. Based on the discussions, several suggestions were presented namely, establishing a Directorate for Patents, supporting national organizations working for the promotion of intellectual property in cooperation with international organizations, reforming and amending intellectual property legislations, and drafting a model law to organize all aspects of intellectual property.

### **Syria**

On 16-17 November 2009, the Environment and Population Activity Committee in the Syrian People's Assembly organized a **Workshop on Gender Laws**, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Following the opening ceremony headed by the Speaker, MPs, experts, and representatives of civil society reviewed gender laws and the role of civil society in empowering women.



### **The United Arab Emirates**

From 13 to 16 December 2009, the General Secretariat of the Federal National Council organized a training session for the staff of GCC parliaments on the "Rules for Drafting Legal Texts Using a Legal Matrix". The training seminar covered several topics, and in particular, the basics of using a legal matrix to draft legislations, and the rules of legal drafting. Ten years after the first joint training program, this training session was organized under the joint training plan of the Shura Councils, national councils, Umma councils and legislative councils of the GCC countries, aiming at perfecting the skills of parliamentary General Secretariats' staff, and improving their performance to support parliamentarians in the fulfillment of their tasks.

### **First Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab World 4th Council Meeting/Conference of the Association**

On 6-7 October 2009, the **First Meeting of Women Parliamentarians of the Association of Senates, Shura and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World** was held in Abuja, Nigeria, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Entitled "The Role of Women in the Development of Modern Nationhood", the meeting aimed at encouraging the participation of African and Arab women in



politics and decision-making, encouraging African and Arab governments to grant women the chance to access education and participate in local and central administration, and promoting women's role in development and other sectors of modern societies.

#### ***Fourth Regional Conference Of Women Parliamentarians And Women In Political Decision-Making Positions Of The Gulf Cooperation Council States***

On 9-10 December 2009, the Bahraini Council of Representatives and the Shura Council, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organized the **Fourth Regional Conference on Women Parliamentarians and Women in Political Decision-Making Positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council States**, entitled "National Plans on Gender Equality: The Role of Women Parliamentarians".

During the discussion of national strategies and plans for women, participants examined regional and international experiences and highlighted the role of women parliamentarians in drafting and implementing national strategies for women, the challenges they face and their needs. Participants also underlined the importance of cooperation, coordination and networking with governmental and civil society institutions.

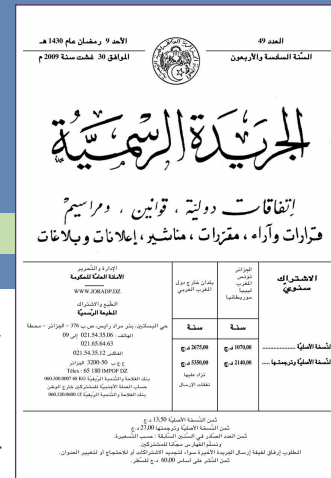
[www.arabparliaments.org](http://www.arabparliaments.org)

A Parliamentary Development knowledge Portal in the Arab Region

[Arabparliaments.org](http://Arabparliaments.org) continues to provide easy access to a host of parliamentary development resources, such as studies, guidebooks, manuals, and databases. Among the many databases available on the website, the Arab Political Parties Database which initially included information on political parties in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco, has been recently updated and expanded to include information on political parties in 4 new countries, namely: Algeria, Mauritania, oPt, and Yemen. The database now contains information on 180 political parties in 8 Arab countries.

Information provided includes basic data such as the date of establishment, name of founder, goals, political agenda, publications and other media outlets, participation in parliamentary elections and number of seats won, electoral alliances, and representation in government. Special attention was given to the internal governance of the parties through providing the date of the last internal elections, as well as collecting the parties' internal regulations. The initiative's team is currently working on expanding it to include additional Arab countries.

# Arab Legislation



## Algeria

The Algerian National People's Assembly issued Law No. 09-08 of 22 October 2009, including the approval of [Order No. 09-04 of 27 August 2009 on the National Consultative Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights](#). This new law aims at determining the tasks, establishment and functioning of the National Consultative Committee.

## Iraq

The Council of Representatives of Iraq approved [Law No. 27 of 2009 for the Protection of the Environment](#). This law provides for the establishment of the Council for the Protection of the Environment, to be headed by the Environment minister. The Council will be responsible for coordinating with all ministries and stakeholders, examining the environmental aspect of national plans, projects and programs before their adoption and implementation, and reviewing environmental legislations or plans.

On 6 December 2009, the Iraqi Council of Representative unanimously adopted a [Law Amending Electoral Law No. 16 of 2005](#). The new law increases the number of representatives in the Council to 325, of which 310 seats are reserved for the 18 Iraqi governorates, and 15 are compensatory seats, namely 8 for minorities. According to the law, the voters roll would be based on the 2005 elections population census, collected from food ration data, with an annual demographic increase of 2.8% of eligible voters for each governorate. Open lists were also adopted, and

voters are now given the choice to vote for the entire list or for one of the candidates on the list. Independent candidates were also granted the right to run in the legislative elections.

## Sudan

On 29 December 2009, the Sudanese National Assembly unanimously approved the [Law on the Referendum on the Secession of the South](#), to be held in 2011, after having reviewed and amended some controversial articles debated between the two governing parties. The new law grants Southern Sudan citizens, born after the 1st of January 1956, the right to vote anywhere in Sudan without being restricted to a certain province.

The National Assembly also unanimously approved the [2009 Report of the Political Parties' Affairs Council on 29 December 2009](#). The Council, established just a year ago, reviewed in the report the registration process of political parties, their functioning, their respect of the Constitution and relevant laws, their bylaws, and the examination of filed complaints. The report also included a number of recommendations, namely supporting political parties according to determined criteria, giving them the chance to perform their political duties without restrictions, granting them equal media access, and providing immunity to party premises and leaders.



## In The Spotlight

### ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN THE ARAB WORLD:

#### 6 AN EMERGING ISSUE

*Guaranteeing the right to access information and knowledge is essential for freedom of expression and opinion, and the right to scientific research and political participation. It is also a necessity for sustainable economic development and for a transparent and competitive investment environment. Around the world, 88 countries have adopted legislation guaranteeing access to information. Will Arab countries steer clear of this global trend or instead, take part in it?*

In the Arab region, awareness about access to information as an important right is increasing slowly. Yet, to this date, most Arab Constitutions fail to mention this essential right, a cornerstone for the rule of law, as it provides a mechanism to obtain information for oversight and accountability.

Defined as the publication of governmental information and data and their dissemination across different media, access to information is vital to counter all forms of corruption. This task can be undertaken by parliaments to consolidate good governance, and also by the press as a key player in the fourth authority linking authorities to citizens.

However, Arab parliaments and parliamentarians often denounce the difficulty in obtaining official information, and the many obstacles which weaken their capacity to oversee the government's policies and hold it accountable.

For the last two decades, governments around the world have become increasingly transparent, once dictatorships had collapsed and new constitutions were adopted, and many have introduced special provisions on the right to access information. In developed countries, access to public information has become a right protected by the Constitution as a natural right on one hand, and consecrated by international conventions and national legislation on the other.

Though Constitutions in some Arab countries guarantee freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the press—regardless of their applicability and practical restrictions—, they fail to include direct provisions on freedom of information. Freedom of information can be legislated by institutions in a democratic system, or can result from civil society lobbying such as in South Africa, the Philippines and Thailand earlier. Jordan was the first country in the Arab region to guarantee the right to access information.

In 2007, Jordan adopted a law guaranteeing the right of citizens to access government information (Law No. 47 of 2007). Most other Arab countries are lagging behind, with only Yemen and Bahrain being close to adopting a law guaranteeing the right of citizens to access public information.

In Bahrain, the Council of Representatives approved the report of the Services

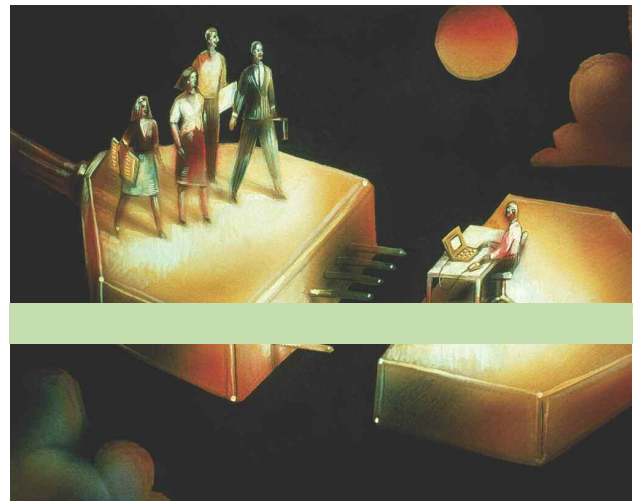
Committee on the Draft Law of Access to Information on 17 November 2009. It was then transferred to the Shura Council where it is being discussed by the Services Committee, to be transferred later to the King of Bahrain for ratification.

In Yemen, a member of the House of Representatives submitted a draft law on access to information, which was adopted by the government by virtue of a Council of Ministers' decision in 2008. The draft law is currently being examined and discussed in the House of Representatives, to be ratified and adopted once constitutional procedures are completed.

However, the press, civil society organizations and unions in both Yemen and Bahrain have expressed severe criticism to these draft laws, and asked for their revision before their final adoption.

In Lebanon, a law is currently being drafted to guarantee access to information. During a press conference held at the Lebanese National Assembly on 14 September 2009, MPs submitted this draft law on "Access to information", which is the outcome of the campaign launched by the National Network for the Promotion of Access to Information, including 17 representatives from associations, ministries, unions, the parliament and the media. After several successful meetings with parliamentarians, journalists and civil society organizations, the network sought to meet with ministers to garner their support for the draft law.

In Palestine, the draft law is still lingering in the Legislative Council. Due to the political circumstances in the Council and the Israeli occupation, the law has not been discussed. However, the General Statistics Law in Palestine includes a number of articles



granting citizens the right to access data collected by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

In other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Morocco, there is a growing demand to issue laws guaranteeing access to information. In some others draft bills on dissemination of information are discreetly being drafted, as a result of the relentless efforts of civil society organizations to open the public debate on access to information legislation.

Access to information is increasingly recurrent on the agenda of Arab states. It is also gaining momentum in Arab civil society, mentioned in a number of press releases, documents and recommendations, and is now fueling activities of organizations, alliances, and national and regional networks.

In July 2008, the Arab Network for Freedom of Information was launched, including organizations from Morocco, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain. Access to information was also mentioned as a demand, for the first time, in the final document of the Parallel Conference to the Forum for the Future, held on October 2008 in Dubai, as it was included several times in the final recommendations.

At the end of January 2009, the Arab Network for Freedom of Information held its first

regional conference in Cairo, with representatives from Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Palestine and Jordan. The conference adopted the "Cairo Declaration on Access to Information in the Arab region" and the "Draft Principles of Arab Media and the

Right to Access Information", hopefully confirming a firm willingness to engage in a reform process towards the consolidation of transparency and accountability in the Arab countries.

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## Iraq: Amendment of the Electoral Law

Iraq has recently faced a deadlock to amend the electoral law for the 2010 legislative elections. As the adoption of the law was delayed, the legislative elections were postponed to March 2010, since holding the elections, originally scheduled on 16 January 2010, became an impossible task.

### ***First Amendment to the Electoral Law***

On 8 November 2009, after a heated debate between parliamentary blocs, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed the [first amendment to Electoral Law No. 16 of 2005](#). For four months, lawmakers had disputed quotas for women and minorities, electoral constituencies, the number of representatives in the Council, and the electoral system, as open lists gathered popular support, while parliamentary blocs preferred closed lists. However, at the heart of the debate lied the oil-rich province of Kirkuk: Arabs and Turkmens had been asking for the adoption of updated voting rolls, while Kurds backed annexing Kirkuk to Kurdistan, based on Kurds' demographic increase.

The amendment increased the size of the Council of Representatives from 275 to 323 members, in line with the demographic increase since the 2005 elections. Article 1 of the law allocated 5% of compensatory seats, equivalent to 16 seats, among which 8 were reserved to minorities. The amendment also provided for the use of old voter rolls, and election results were to be reviewed, should an unusual increase in voter registration during the last 5 years be revealed. An open list system was also adopted, where voters could vote either for a list, for one of the candidates on the list or for an individual candidate running on his/her own. In Kirkuk, the elections would be held according to the 2009 voters roll, and a committee would be formed to investigate the violations in all provinces where voter rolls are deemed dubious.

### ***Veto of the Amended Law***

On 18 November 2009, the Iraqi vice-president vetoed article 1 of the amendment to the electoral law, as it was believed to deprive millions of Iraqi expatriates from being



represented in the parliament, and asked to increase compensatory seats from 5% to a minimum of 15%. The amendment was then sent to the Council of Representatives to be reviewed.

### ***Second Amendment to the Electoral Law***

On 23 November 2009, the Council of Representatives adopted [the Amendment to the Electoral Law](#), namely the right for Iraqi



expatriates to vote in the governorate they lived in, while the number of seats remained unchanged. According to this second amendment, voter rolls would be based on the 2005 population census, collected from food ration data, with an annual demographic increase of 2.8% of eligible voters for each governorate. The amended law was then referred to the Presidency Council, as some feared the law would be vetoed again.

### ***Approval of the Electoral Law***

On 6 December 2009, the Council of Representatives, in an extraordinary session, unanimously adopted a decision with an explanatory memorandum of Electoral Law No. 16 of 2005, to avoid another veto after a consensus was reached. According to this new decision, the Council of Representatives would increase from 275 to 325 members, of which 310 seats are reserved for the 18 Iraqi governorates, while 15 are compensatory seats, 8 of which for minorities. Also attached to the decision was an annex explaining the distribution of seats between governorates. On 9 December, the Presidency Council ratified the [Amendment Law to Electoral Law No. 16 of 2005](#) [Unofficial translation], and on 16 December, the Council ratified CoR Decision No. 24 of 2009 with the explanatory memorandum of the electoral law.

The electoral law stalemate ended, and it was determined that legislative elections would be held on 7 March 2010. Iraqi expatriates would be able to vote on 5 March 2010 for three consecutive days in 23 countries.

## In Focus

## THE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN TUNISIA

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On Sunday 25 October 2009, Tunisians cast their votes for their president and parliamentary representatives for the 2009-2014 term. Four candidates competed in the presidential elections, while 1,080 candidates, representing 9 political parties, in addition to independent lists, competed for the 214 parliamentary seats. From Saturday 17 October 2009 to 24 October 2009, Tunisians residing abroad were able to head to the polls to choose their president.

Elections were held according to the provisions of the [Electoral Code](#), which was amended several times, last on 13 April 2009, to increase the number of MPs from 189 (of which 37 for the opposition) to 214 MPs (of which 53 for the opposition). In 2008, the minimum voting age was lowered from 20 to 18, by virtue of a constitutional law ratified on 28 July 2008, including an amendment of article 20 of the Constitution; around half a million new voters were then added to voters' lists.

Before the elections, the Tunisian government established the [National Elections Observatory](#), to oversee the presidential and legislative elections, and in particular to monitor candidacies, electoral campaigns, voting, tallying the votes, results and appeals. The Observatory will submit to the President of the Republic a report on the proceedings of the elections.

Official results published on Monday 26 October 2009 indicated that voter turnout in the presidential elections reached 89.45%. President Zein Al Abidin Ben Ali, president of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), was

declared victorious for a fifth term in office with 89.62% of votes.

4,447,388 out of 4,974,707 registered voters participated in the legislative elections, accounting for 89.40% of voters. The Democratic Constitutional Rally obtained 3,754,559 votes, i.e. 84.59% of votes, and won 161 out of 214 seats in the parliament. The remaining 53 seats were distributed among 6 opposition parties as follows:

- The Movement of Socialist Democrats (MDS) won 16 seats with 205,374 votes, i.e. 4.63% of total votes.
- The Popular Unity Party (PUP) won 12 seats with 150,639 votes, i.e. 3.39% of total votes.
- The Unionist Democratic Union won 9 seats with 113,773 votes, i.e. 2.56% of total votes.
- The Liberal Social Party (PSL) won 8 seats with 99,468 votes, i.e. 2.24% of total votes.
- The Green Party for Progress won 6 seats with 74,185 votes, i.e. 1.67% of total votes.
- Attajdid Movement won 2 seats with 22,206 votes, i.e. 0.5% of total votes.

The Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (FDTL), the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), and independent lists failed to win any seat in the Parliament.

Women represented 18% of the total number of candidates in the 2009 legislative elections in Tunisia. 59 women were elected to parliament, sensibly increasing the percentage of women MPs to 27.57%, currently the highest among the Arab region's parliaments.

[\(Complete official results of the 2009 presidential and legislative elections in Tunisia\)](#)

# Parliamentary Contribution

## PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT IN YEMEN: BLOCK 18... A SUCCESS STORY

**By MP Ali Ashal,**  
Member of the Yemeni Parliament



The Yemeni Parliament, having recently realized the importance of its oversight role, in the oil sector particularly, exposed the

infamous case of the Block 18, through the **Oil and Development Parliamentary Committee**. Below are highlights of the Block 18 case:

In 1985, Hunt Oil Co. discovered a large oil reservoir in Block 18, and concluded a 20-year Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) with the Yemeni government, renewable for 5 years upon mutual agreement.

In 2005, as the PSA expiration date grew closer, the Yemeni government submitted a proposal before the parliament to partially amend the PSA. At the time, the Oil and Development Parliamentary Committee was involved in a confrontation with the government on a case of corruption in Block 53, as part of the government's share in the Block was sold in shady circumstances. The Committee successfully managed to terminate the deal and retrieve the public share, unveiling corrupt behavior of powerful government officials. Fearing rejection of the submitted PSA extension proposal, the government then

withdrew it, as the company included as a partner in Block 18 was the one that had bought the public share in Block 53.

Yet, the Oil and Development Committee persistently questioned the Ministry for its future plans and the options available for Block 18, once the PSA expires. Clearly, authorities had decided to grant Hunt Oil Co. the extension of the PSA. All necessary measures had been taken to seal the deal away from the Parliament's watchful eyes, regardless of the fact that, once the deal expires, the Yemeni government had the right to repossess Block 18 reserves and installations, and that any PSA extension should be concluded according to new conditions in favor of Yemen.

After examining the partial amendment proposal submitted by the government, the committee concluded that the amended proposal was not in favor of Yemen, mainly because of the inadequacy of the public revenues to be collected by the Yemeni government.

Conversely, the Oil Ministry informed the Committee that extending the PSA for Hunt Co. was the only option, and that the Parliament's sole task was to examine the amendments. The Parliament was also informed that the government was the only authority to decide of the extension, and if the Parliament rejected the amendments, the extension would be applicable according to the original PSA.

The Oil and Development Committee published its report on Block 18, covering constitutional transgressions and damages to the Yemeni interests perpetrated by the government. The report included information and figures on potential public losses for the five-year extension period, amounting to around 4 billion dollars. Consequently, the Parliament rejected the PSA extension for Hunt Co., and the government could only accept, for lack of valid reasons to contest the decision.

In late 2005, the Yemeni Exploration & Production Operations Co. took over Block 18 from Hunt Co. in compliance with the Parliament's decision. In the first quarter of 2006, Hunt Co. filed a lawsuit against the Yemeni government before the International Commercial Court in Paris, asking for 3.8 billion dollars in damages, for having failed to



CPI 2009:  
CORRUPTION POSES A SERIOUS  
PROBLEM IN THE ARAB REGION

Transparency International (TI) released its Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2009. The Index, which measured the perceived level of public-sector corruption in 180 countries, stressed that "the perception of corruption remains a serious problem in the Middle East and North Africa". It also revealed the relationship between lack of security and increased corruption, with countries witnessing political turmoil such as Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia ranking at the bottom of the index.

implement the extension contract the government signed. Yemen's defense attorney (from Clyde & Co. legal firm) collected documents and presented arguments, based on the Parliament's position, to defend the fulfillment of its legislative and oversight role in this case. Lawsuit procedures and witness interrogations lasted around 2 years, during which arbitrators listened to testimonies of members of the Committee.

Arbitrators concluded that the ties between Hunt Co. on one hand, and the Oil Ministry and the Yemeni government on the other, were ambiguous and shady, and that the Parliament's intervention has shed light on the case. In July 2008, arbitrators ordered Hunt Co. to drop the lawsuit, and the contract was declared void.

The case of Block 18 is undoubtedly a success story for the Yemeni Parliament. It illustrates a case of effective parliamentary oversight, and provides a fine example of the parliament's role in defending preserving the interests and resources of the people.

# Regional Parliamentary Workshop

TOWARDS STRENGTHENING THE OVERSIGHT FUNCTION OF  
ARAB PARLIAMENTS: IMPROVING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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*Workshop organized in partnership with the Lebanese National Assembly, and in collaboration with UNDP's project at the Parliament.*

Within the framework of its mission to build the capacities of Arab Parliaments, and in light of the participants' recommendations raised in previous activities, the Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region launched a new Working Group on Strengthening the Oversight Function of Arab Parliaments. This working group aims at initiating and consolidating a process involving research, regional seminars, and policy discussions on the oversight function of Arab parliaments. It will also build on the Initiative's previous activities including the [Rabat 2007](#) and [Beirut 2008](#) meetings.

The initiative organized the first meeting of the working group titled "[Towards Strengthening the Oversight Function of Arab Parliaments: Improving the Legal Framework](#)" in Beirut on 16-17 October 2009, in cooperation with the Lebanese National Assembly. The workshop provided a platform for dialog and sharing experiences among around sixty-five participants including parliamentarians, secretaries general, experts and practitioners from Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Egypt, Great Britain, Iraq,

Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, oPt, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

The workshop aimed at reviewing the legal framework governing parliamentary oversight and the prerogatives given to the parliaments in the constitution and in the parliamentary internal rules of procedure. Accordingly, the main focus of the workshop was to examine the "oversight potential" of Arab parliaments rather than to evaluate to what extent Arab Parliaments actually practice their oversight role.

Over two days of intensive discussions, participants were able to develop a better understanding of parliament's oversight role as provided in the constitution and parliamentary rules of procedure of selected Arab countries, and of the different and varying oversight mechanisms and tools used, through the presentation and discussion of regional comparative studies and several country case studies. Participants also benefited from the exposure to the international best practices in several new democracies. The Belgian experience was also discussed following the valuable presentation made by the Honorary Secretary General of the Belgian House of Representatives.





In a region where several countries are still in or coming out of the grasp of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, and where policy making is still dominated by the executive, strengthening the oversight function of parliaments becomes a priority. In an effort to pinpoint the weaknesses of the legal framework and identify possible areas of reform, the participants tried to answer several questions, of which: How does the parliament hold the government into account in countries where it can exercise oversight? What oversight tools are available as compared to other parliaments in the region and beyond? What are the currently missing instruments that need to be introduced?

Following lively sessions in a highly interactive environment, participants made several suggestions. They underlined the need to conduct additional comparative studies on selected issues, equally underscoring the importance of identifying general principles that can guide

parliamentarians when reforming the parliamentary rules of procedure with a view to strengthening the oversight function of Arab parliaments.

The workshop was viewed by most participants as an innovative approach to the topic of parliamentary oversight, and an excellent forum to address the existing knowledge gap and build a specialized parliamentary network. One of the Lebanese MPs present stated that the “workshop provided an incentive to reform the parliamentary rules and regulations in order to strengthen our parliament’s oversight role”.



# Parliaments of The World

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## ***The World e-Parliament Conference 2009***

The World e-Parliament Conference 2009 was held between 3 and 5 November 2009 at the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Co-organized by the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the U.S. House of Representatives and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, brought together four hundred elected members and staff of ninety-five parliaments. Participants discussed ways to improve parliamentary representation, transparency, accountability, and openness through better use of ICT, explored new internet based communication tools, and exchanged knowledge and experiences in ICT strategic planning, as Well As Using ICT In Legislative Processes And Parliamentary Websites.

## ***Evaluating Parliament: Objectives, Methods, Results And Impact***

Among the many activities organized by the IPU during the last quarter of 2009, this activity was organized in cooperation with the Association of Secretaries General of Parliament and other partners on 22 October 2009. This one-day conference, targeted at parliamentarians, Secretaries General and staff involved in the future directions of parliament, provided a forum for discussion of different approaches to the evaluation of parliament, sharing of lessons learned and understanding the potential results and impact of evaluation.

## ***Pan-African Parliament Speakers Conference: Transforming the Pan African Parliament into a Legislative Body***

The Pan-African Parliament organized "The African Parliament Speakers Conference" in Midrand, South Africa, on October 8-9, 2009. The conference provided a platform for dialogue between the Pan-African Parliament and the national parliaments of Member States. Among the many issues discussed were the transformation of the Pan African Parliament into a legislative body; the development of the African Parliament Knowledge Network (APKN) and the various modalities that will better ensure awareness of citizens of Africa of AU Policies and Decisions; and the need to establish principles which will lead to the development of a framework for the effective domestication of African Union policies.

## The Initiative

*The Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) is a joint project launched by UNDP's Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS) and the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), with the support of the Belgian government to address the increasing demand for parliamentary assistance in the Arab Region. It builds on recent activities, findings, and lessons learned, and aims at promoting democratic governance through enhancing the role, capacity and image of the legislative institutions in the Arab countries and supporting the work of their members and administrations.*

## Knowledge Building

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### **Arab Parliamentarians Toolkit to Promote the United Nations Convention against Corruption**

This toolkit was published by the Arab Region Parliamentarians against Corruption (ARPAC) to introduce Arab parliamentarians to the tools and legal

means available for them to contribute to implementing the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in their countries, and enable them to determine the most appropriate way to exercise their role as the legitimate representatives of citizens and active members in the legislature. The toolkit includes three parts: the first part provides an analysis of the Convention; the second determines practical steps to promote the role of parliamentarians in implementing the convention; and the final part provides examples of implementation from the Arab region.



### **"Parliamentarians' Guide": Publication of the Lebanese National Assembly in Cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme**

The General Secretariat of the Lebanese National Assembly, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, published the first issue of the "Parliamentarians' Guide", to promote communication between the parliament's administration and Lebanese parliamentarians, particularly after the June 2009 legislative elections.

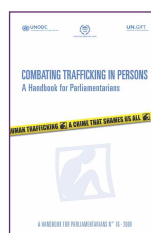
The guide includes three parts:

- The first part consists of three chapters, reviewing the history, organizational structure and competencies of the Lebanese Parliament; the rights and duties of parliamentarians in all fields; and the means and conditions to practice these rights.
- The second part consists of two chapters, covering

the Parliament's international, regional and bilateral relations, and parliamentary support projects.

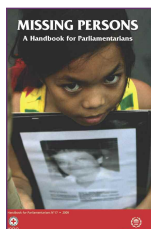
- The third part consists of three chapters, covering media in the Lebanese National Assembly such as the parliamentary library, media and information technology.

A questionnaire is also included for parliamentarians to assess the guide and present their suggestions, and a CD-Rom is enclosed providing website addresses of 224 parliaments in 174 countries.



### **Combating Trafficking in Persons. A Handbook for Parliamentarians**

This joint UNODC/IPU publication contains a compilation of international laws and good practices developed to combat human trafficking. It offers guidance on how national legislation can be brought in line with international standards. The Handbook also outlines measures to prevent the crime of trafficking in persons, to prosecute offenders and to protect victims. It also contains advice on how to report on this crime and how to engage civil society in the cause.



### **Missing Persons. A Handbook for Parliamentarians**

This IPU handbook, published in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), sheds light on the issue of missing persons. The handbook presents an outline of the responsibilities of State authorities under international law, and provides an explanation of the essential role that MPs could play. It also includes proposal for a model law on missing persons, as well as a number of instruments that MPs could use in this area.