

# **Professional Development Programs for Parliamentarians and Staff**

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## **Parliaments as Peacebuilders: Parliaments in Conflict-Affected Countries**

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## **Introduction: Parliaments as Peacebuilders**

Over the last couple of decades the world has witnessed a transformation in the nature of conflict. Traditional inter-state conflicts have become rarer as non-traditional intra-state conflicts, whether in the form of civil wars, armed insurrections, violent secessionist movements or domestic focused warfare continue to rage across the globe, touching both hemispheres and every region of the world. Unfortunately, due to the interdependence of states, intra-state conflict has a tendency to move beyond the boundaries of one particular state; this process of diffusion and contagion mean that low-level intra-state conflicts can potentially escalate into more intense inter-state conflict. The evolving nature of conflict has created an impetus to reassess which actors can contribute to resolving this latest incarnation of conflict and more importantly how these actors can contribute to the peacebuilding process, particularly in conflict-affected countries. Parliaments are coming to the fore, more so than ever before, as natural forums which are uniquely designed to address contentious issues and relationships in conflict-affected societies thereby contributing to peacebuilding efforts.

Parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to play leadership roles in their societies and to strengthen peacebuilding from below. They are more representative and their members more accessible to the general public than the executive or judicial branches; therefore, can address contentious issues and relationships in conflict-affected societies. In addition, parliaments institutionalize conflict and are designed, by their very nature, to include disparate sectors of society, and to reflect and express the divergent views of those diverse groups. At its most general level parliaments are able to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention by helping to create national consensus around commonly held values and goals through national policy dialogue. However, they can also contribute to conflict-prevention whilst undertaking its normal every functions.

The role of parliament in conflict-affected countries becomes even more important when considering the contribution parliaments make to poverty reduction and the well-recognized correlation between conflict and poverty; namely that poverty increases societies' vulnerability to conflict, while conflict itself generates poverty. The objective

of this parliamentary training module is to bring these two correlative relationships together to examine the nexus between conflict, poverty and parliament from the perspective of parliaments. A closer examination of the parliament, conflict, poverty nexus suggests that parliaments have a vital role to play in managing conflict not just by addressing contentious issues and relationships but by helping to avert poverty, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

A conflict-affected country, narrowly defined, often means those countries that have recently experienced, are experiencing, or are widely regarded as at risk of experiencing violent conflict. However, this is a relatively blunt definition of the intricate concept of conflict. For the purposes of this parliamentary training module, *conflict* is defined as, the "pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups." This is a much broader definition than armed or violent conflict and enables parliaments to consider ways they can manage and transform conflict at all stages of the conflict cycle, not just when conflict reaches the crisis stage.

Adopting this broader definition of conflict enables us to examine how to stop emerging conflict developing into violent conflict. This is important as there has been a decline in the incidence of civil wars over the last couple of years, shifting the focus away from the resolution of violent conflict to an examination of how emerging conflict can be better managed to prevent an increase in the incidence of violent conflict. It is believed that the strategies discussed in this parliamentary training module have a broad application, but are most applicable to those nations that are prone to civil violence.

Irrespective of the stage of the conflict cycle one is examining there is a general consensus that conflict is a phenomenon that results when people with competing interests seek to fulfill their specific interests, sometimes at the expense of others. It is not the purpose of democratic institutions to resolve tensions; rather there has been recent recognition that all societies are inherently conflicting, and that democracy acts as a system to manage and process conflict. Therefore, the issue is less so how to eradicate conflict and more so how to manage conflict when it emerges.

This module is comprised of the following units:

**1. The Nexus between Parliaments, Poverty Reduction and Conflict:** This unit examines the mutually reinforcing relationship between democratic governance and development and the correlative relationship between poverty and conflict, with the aim of highlighting the different strategies parliament is able to adopt while performing its everyday functions in order to contribute to conflict prevention.

**2. Making Parliament More Representative:** In order for parliament to reach its potential as a forum that can transform conflict, whether by addressing emerging conflict or guarding against the creation of an environment conducive to conflict, parliament has to represent the community's varied interests and ensure that its work responds to the needs of a diverse society. This unit investigates the ways in which parliament is able to ensure it is a truly representative institution.

**3. Advancing Parliament's Legislative Function in Conflict-Affected Societies:** A culture or atmosphere can exist within parliaments in conflict-affected countries that, due to the conflict prone environment, can go beyond being adversarial to being acrimonious. This unit examines how Members of Parliament can participate in the legislative process in a spirit of cooperation to find constructive resolutions that meet the needs of their different constituents. In addition, the legislative agenda, which can be championed in order to strengthen the potential for peace, is canvassed.

**4. Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight to Prevent Conflict and Reduce Poverty:** Parliament has the specific responsibility to exercise oversight of the executive in order to hold it and its agents accountable for their policies and actions. This unit examines how parliament, by ensuring the government is performing well, can instill public confidence in the government and the democratic process. In addition, this unit examines how parliament can support the formation and operation of independent accountability institutions to aid it in its oversight function.

### **5. Social Accountability – Citizens, Civil Society and the Media Working With**

**Parliament:** This unit examines how, by reaching out to their constituents to garner a better understanding of the needs and wants of the community, facilitating the development of a strong civil society that can support parliament's understanding of community issues, and building an informed society through the development of a robust, diverse and independent media, parliament can keep decision-makers socially accountable.

### **6. Regional Parliamentary Peacebuilding and Engagement with International**

**Organizations:** This unit examines parliamentarians' growing interest in participating in regional and international professional associations and forums in order to encourage dialogue, build confidence and facilitate peer to peer learning. An alternative strategy, whereby parliamentarians participate in initiatives sponsored by the multilateral development agencies, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Global Aids Initiative, and the World Bank PRS process, in order to give their constituents a voice and represent their interest in peace and prosperity is also considered.

The content of the units in this module have been arranged so that each unit may stand alone. By referring to the summaries above, it should be possible to select those units that may satisfy individual interests.

Each unit contains suggested topics for discussion or questions to which answers should be attempted in order to reinforce your knowledge. Study of some of the materials in the resource lists at the end of each unit will be required for this purpose.

A select bibliography that is relevant to the study of the unit above is provided at the end of each unit.

# Unit 1: The Nexus between Parliaments, Poverty Reduction and Conflict

## Learning Objectives

### What strategies can parliament take to prevent conflict?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the relationship between poverty and conflict and the impact conflict has on poverty;
- Appreciate how democratic governance contributes to conflict prevention;
- Identify the reasons why democratic governance is good for development;
- Discuss how parliament can contribute to conflict prevention, not only by addressing contentious issues but also by helping to avert poverty.

## **Introduction**

This unit examines the mutually reinforcing relationships between democratic governance and development, and poverty and conflict. The aim of the unit is to highlight the different strategies that parliament is able to adopt in order to contribute to conflict prevention while performing its everyday functions. The important role of parliament in conflict-affected countries is even more pronounced since that there is now a clearly established correlation between poverty and conflict. By addressing issues of poverty, equitable distribution of resources, and economic development parliamentarians can attempt to guard against the creation of an environment that is prone to enabling conflict. This correlation is reinforced by growing evidence of a positive relationship between democratic governance and sustainable long-term development. This positive correlative relationship is termed the *nexus between parliaments, poverty reduction and conflict prevention*.

## **The Relationship between Poverty and Conflict**

Research has shown that countries with a high level of dependence on commodity exports are at a higher risk of experiencing conflict, whilst countries with higher levels of secondary schooling and economic growth have a reduced risk of conflict. From 1980-2002 low-income countries with a per capita income of less than \$US 2,000 experienced conflict that directly caused more than 1000 deaths per year, approximately one out of every five years. This figure dropped to one in every eight years when a country's per capita income grew to be between \$US 2,000 and \$US 4,000 and to one in every 33 years in countries with per capita income in excess of \$US 4,000. Therefore, the higher the rate of economic development the less likely there will be violent conflict.

Civil conflict has an acute impact on economic growth and food production. Such conflict leads to the destruction of infrastructure, loss of life and social capital, as well as curbing direct capital investment. Food production cannot occur in regions where violent conflict is being waged; fields are laid to waste and the means for production are destroyed. Therefore, when the violence stops, a considerable period ensues between the cessation of conflict and the resumption of food production. Furthermore, provision in national budgets for important areas such as education, health, infrastructure and agricultural development are often diverted for military purposes to the detriment of economic growth and the wellbeing of the population. The average per capita income of countries engaged in conflict over the last 20 years is significantly lower than that of developing countries as a whole. Moreover, the impact of conflict on the economy of a country lingers well beyond the cessation of conflict, making the country vulnerable to a return to violent conflict; this is commonly referred to as the conflict trap.

Given the mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty and conflict, it is pertinent to consider the ways in which parliament can contribute, not only to managing and transforming conflict, but also to addressing poverty, lack of growth and commodity dependence - conditions that are conducive to conflict.



## **The Relationship between Democracy and Conflict**

Democracies do not go to war against each other, and are less likely to instigate war against non-democracies; however, semi-democracies or states undergoing democratic transitions are innately more conflicting and experience higher rates of intra-state conflict and civil war. The reasoning for this heightened risk of conflict varies; however, it is clear that improving economic conditions and political participation are keys to neutralizing the potential threat of conflict posed by semi-democracies and countries undergoing a democratic transition.

## **The Relationship between Democracy and Development**

The last few years have seen a sea change in thinking on the relationship between democracy and development. Recently it has become clear that there is no trade-off between democracy and development. Research on the role of democracy in economic growth in low-income countries over the last 20 years has shed light on the dynamic between democracy and development. Most significantly, these studies have been able to draw upon the experience of the 'third wave of democratization,' which started in Portugal in 1974 and continued into the new millennium with the democratization of countries around the globe, from Latin America to the former-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and throughout Africa and Asia. The Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, famously argued that democracy, characterized by civil and political rights, was the best system to prevent economic and social disasters. The most recent empirical analysis, which examined the cumulative experience of developing countries, ascertained that those countries with more representative and pluralistic systems of government generally developed more rapidly and consistently than developing countries with closed systems.

There are a number of features in open and pluralistic systems that aid development and performance. These include vertical and horizontal accountability of decision

makers, whether via elections or separation of powers between the executive, parliament and judiciary; the openness of governance, especially in terms of access to information; transparency within society; and political adaptability. Democratic systems provide an opportunity through which one set of decision-makers is replaced with another in a nonviolent manner — if decision-makers and representatives are not responsive to community demands, they can be removed from office at the next election.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that open and pluralistic systems of governance lead to better development outcomes and have a far better record of preventing violent conflict, especially with other democratic governments. The role of parliament in conflict-affected countries becomes important when you consider the contribution parliaments make to poverty reduction and the well-recognized correlation between conflict and poverty; namely that poverty increases societies' vulnerability to conflict, while conflict itself generates poverty. A closer examination of the parliament, conflict, poverty nexus suggests that parliaments have a vital role to play in managing conflict not just by addressing contentious issues and relationships but by helping to avert poverty, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

## Unit 1 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. Why does violent conflict inhibit development?
2. Why do development and increase in spending on secondary schooling reduce the likelihood of conflict?
3. What is it about open and pluralistic systems of governance that stimulate development?
4. Why should parliament seek to avoid building a relationship with the media that is adversarial or too close?
5. Why are countries undergoing political transitions more likely to experience conflict?

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## Unit 2: Making Parliament More Representative

### Learning Objectives

#### How does a representative parliament reduce conflict?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Recognize the importance of a representative parliament to conflict prevention;
- Understand that the electoral system plays a key role in determining who is represented in parliament;
- Appreciate that in order for all parties to accept the outcome of elections in conflict-affected countries the electoral process needs to be simple, transparent and implemented by an independent body.

### **Introduction**

A democratic system requires meaningful participation and representation that integrates all societal groups – religious, ethnic, tribal, political, gender, socio-economic, cultural and other minority groups – into the decision-making process. Members of Parliament should ideally reflect the diverse communities from which they come; thus, minority groups should not be systematically excluded from being represented. Improving the representation of parliament strengthens its ability to reach out to all sectors of society. Furthermore, when a representative parliament is able to develop multiple loyalties through political cooperation, it lays the foundation for the emergence of a constructive conflict culture, which is better able to manage conflict without resorting to violence.

Parliament is a forum that utilizes dialogue and discussion to find workable solutions for problems within communities that satisfy, to a greater or lesser extent, all parties. Ultimately, a representative parliament is better able to contribute to peacebuilding by

bringing together members from all groups in society who, through collaboration, begin to develop a common vision, that accommodates the interests of all groups. As a constitutionally mandated institution, parliament provides a permanent forum where representatives from groups with divergent interests can come together and channel their actions to help shape legislation and policies. If each parliamentarian ensures that the legislature responds to the needs of her or his community, parliament can help stop communal discord from flaring into violent conflict.

### **Encouraging Participation and Representation in Parliament through the Electoral System**

Generally, institutional design has an important role in newly democratizing and divided societies because, in the absence of other structures, politics becomes the primary mode of communication between divergent social forces. This reinforces the need to ensure the institutional design of parliament and the electoral system results in a representative outcome that facilitates broad-based participation in the democratic process. Younger parliaments and legislatures dominated by one party or group, to the exclusion of other groups in society, are often unable to contribute to peacebuilding as they have limited capacity. Appropriate electoral designs can ensure that all groups have a voice in parliament, thereby transforming parliament from a collection of select members into an arena where differences can be dealt with and conflict managed.

Electoral systems can be designed to encourage moderation, thereby helping to diffuse extremist positions. In this way it can be said that parliaments create the conditions for the emergence of antagonists who are prepared to cooperate. The electoral model that is selected is important to peacebuilding endeavors because it reflects the ways in which conflicts are expressed within a legislature these are also the means by which conflicts are resolved. No single electoral system is perfect; rather, it is a matter of picking the best system for the particular circumstance. However, when choosing a system regard should be shown to the impact that the type of participation and representation achieved as a result of the electoral system will have on peacebuilding.

The objectives that a society wishes to achieve by implementing a particular electoral model should be taken into consideration during the design of a country's electoral system. Ultimately, a representative parliament is better able to contribute to peacebuilding as it brings together representatives from all groups in society that, by working together, begin to develop a common vision, which accommodates the interests of all groups. Parliament is the perfect forum in which to bring together representatives from all sectors of the community to bridge their differences, build relationships and develop a cohesive vision.

Some of the design objectives that might assist in making parliament more participatory and representative thus better able to enhance the peacebuilding process, include:

- Fragmentation of support for an extraordinarily large majority group;
- Inducing majority groups to behave moderately towards other groups by engaging in inter-group bargaining. This differs from fragmentation in that it seeks to provide incentives for moderation rather than trying to split the majority group. Examples of arrangements that seek to achieve this objective are the Lebanese electoral system, whereby seats in parliament are reserved for specific ethnic/religious groups, but all citizens are entitled to vote for each of the seats; and the Nigerian electoral system, where in order to win the presidency a candidate must have at least 25 percent of the vote in no less than two thirds of all of the states. Furthermore, the alternate vote system is often touted as an electoral design that promotes moderation;
- Encouraging the formation of political parties that represent constituents from diverse backgrounds, either via coalitions or more inclusive political parties;
- Encouraging a degree of fluidity so as to avoid the bifurcation of the system as has happened in many developed democracies, such as the United States where the seats in Congress are split between only two parties. Once fluidity has been achieved, the electoral design needs to impede the bifurcation of that system. Common strategies used to achieve this objective are adopting federalist models or requiring mixed lists.

- Attaining proportionality between the number of votes and the number of seats gained by particular groups in parliament, whether it be a cultural, religious or political group
- Reducing the potential for a minority group to win a majority of seats
- Ensuring the accountability of members of parliament to their constituents; and
- Guaranteeing the victory of the Condorcet winner. The Condorcet winner is the candidate who would receive a majority of the vote in a head-to-head contest with each and every other candidate. Sometimes simpler models, such as First Past the Post can achieve an anomalous result. The Alternate Vote model is often recommended as the best model for determining the Condorcet winner; however, there are disadvantages to the Alternate Vote system in that it does not produce a proportional result.

**Box 1**  
**Common Electoral Systems**

- 1) **Plurality** – A system of voting in which the candidate with the largest number of votes wins;
- 2) **Preferential voting** – A system in which voters rank candidates. If no candidate receives a majority, those with fewest votes are eliminated one by one, applying votes to the second choice candidate, until a selection can be made;
- 3) **Proportional Representation** – A system in which representatives are elected from multi-seat districts in proportion to the number of votes received. Political parties or candidates are assured that they will have the percent of legislative seats that reflects their public support. A party or candidate need not come in first to win seats;
- 4) **Semi proportional** – A system in which representation of all parties in a legislature is in proportion to their popular vote;
- 5) **Bloc voting** – This voting structure can be used to elect several representatives from a single multimember constituency. There are several variations of bloc voting depending on the ballot type used, however they all produce similar results.

Each of these objectives can be achieved using different electoral systems; however, it should be noted that some of the objectives listed above are mutually exclusive. What needs to be kept in mind is that objectives should be chosen on the basis of their contributions to the peacebuilding process in the conflict-affected country in which it is to be implemented.

In order to assist the peacebuilding effort an

objective of the electoral system should be the inclusion of minority groups. Ensuring minority groups are adequately represented in parliament will assist conflict



management and increase chances for peace. Minority inclusion can be achieved in two ways. The first strategy is to allocate parliamentary seats to specific groups or facilitate over-representation in parliament from regions where minorities live. A number of countries around the world have adopted reserved seats for minority groups, including India, Columbia, Croatia, Taiwan and Niger. The second strategy is to ensure a system is implemented that provides incentives for majority groups to act moderately towards minority groups and to engage in inter-group bargaining in return for electoral success. If the second approach is adopted, parliamentarians may not stem from the social groups they are purporting to represent, but they nevertheless have an electoral incentive to act as the minority group's representative in parliament, allowing their participation in the political process and protecting their interests.

Furthermore, it is not just a matter of crafting an electoral system that allows for participation and representation of all the stakeholders. If an electoral system is perceived as unfair or brings about a result that is perceived as unfair, then it will create conflict and work against peacebuilding efforts. This is particularly the case with new parliaments or new electoral laws where the application of the electoral system is untested. The result is that the lack of acceptance of the parliament by dissenting parties and the reluctance of the opposition to engage forcefully yet constructively prevents the parliament from performing its core functions.

In order to avert this challenge to the outcome, designers need to include all the stakeholders in the design process to ensure that the parliament is not only representative, but perceived to be representative by all the electorate. Furthermore, the system should be simple for voters to understand and simple to run, the results should be fair or proportional, areas of contention should be minimized, and the process must be transparent.

## **The Electoral Law and Electoral Management Bodies**

The preliminary step in ensuring a transparent and legitimate election process is to set the rules that will govern conduct of the elections, usually through incorporation into the electoral law. The electoral law is often supplemented by regulations promulgated by government agencies or electoral management bodies. This can be compared to the electoral system, which is the method by which votes cast in the general election translate into seats won by candidates or parties.

Generally speaking, the issues that need to be canvassed in the electoral law or the constitution include:

- Qualification to register as a voter, together with any restrictions on such rights;
- Qualification for and restrictions on candidacy;
- Rules governing seat allocation, including minority quotas or allocations;
- Qualification on terms of office;
- Methods for fulfilling casual vacancies;
- Removal of mandates;
- Election offences/violations and mechanism for dealing with them;
- The secrecy of the vote; and;
- Election management.;

As the process for amending constitutions is usually more complex than normal legislation or regulations, it is usual for the constitution of a country to contain only the most fundamental electoral rights and basic electoral principles.

Electoral management bodies play a pivotal role in the conduct of transparent elections and are responsible for organizing the election and compiling the voter lists. One body usually undertakes the functions of an electoral management body, but in some circumstances, these duties are split between different bodies. The powers and responsibilities of the electoral management body should be clearly set out in the legal framework for the elections, such as how the body is constituted and how it conducts its business. Electoral management bodies have many and varying functions, including:

- Conducting elections and referendums;
- Compiling and maintaining a register of voters (voter lists);
- Promoting public awareness of electoral matters by conducting civic education, especially targeted at disadvantaged or disenfranchised minority groups and women;
- Ensuring that women and minorities are enfranchised;
- Training electoral officials/ workers;
- Keeping candidates and political parties apprised of the electoral process;
- Providing information and advice about electoral matters to the government, the legislature, and departments of the executive;
- Creating regulations to govern the electoral process;
- Enforcing the electoral law and regulations;
- Researching electoral policy;
- Engaging in international cooperation and assistance; and;
- Certifying and promulgating results.

In order to facilitate a transparent election process without political bias, parliaments can encourage and support legislation that would establish an independent electoral commission, along with constitutional protection of such a commission. Parliamentarians can develop a process, involving all political parties and representatives, from a broad range of interests in the community, to appoint members of the commission. Furthermore, parliamentary committees can provide oversight of the conduct of the independent electoral commission; it is desirable that they be similarly representative. Parliament can ensure that the Electoral Commission is provided with adequate funding through the budget cycle process.

### **The Role of the Opposition in Representing the Community's Collective Interest in Conflict-Prevention**

Ensuring that parliament reaches its potential as a representative institution requires more than the successful implementation of a transparent and legitimate election

process. Once a representative parliament has been elected it is the responsibility of parliamentarians to represent the community's common interest in preventing violent conflict and reducing poverty. However, when thinking about what parliament can do in order to contribute to conflict prevention, there is a tendency to focus on the role that the majority plays in parliament, rather than parliament as an institution. Every parliamentarian has the capacity and opportunity to represent the broad interests of their constituency and society in general in conflict prevention and poverty reduction. It is just as important for opposition and minority parties to be effective representatives and contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding as it is for the majority. The strategies employed by opposition parliamentarians may differ somewhat from majority members, depending on their opportunities to contribute. The enabling environment, including the political, financial, regulatory or electoral environments in which political parties, and in particular the opposition parties, operate and function impacts their capacity to fulfill their roles, whilst influencing their strategy and structure.

When engaging in peace processes, parliament should develop a political consensus so that it can speak with one voice on important issues and provide continuity. Alternatively, if relations between the government and sectors of the community become acrimonious, and the conflict has the potential to escalate, opposition parties can act as a bridge between the conflicting groups and the government. This becomes the case especially in parliamentary systems in which the executive is drawn directly from the party that commands a majority in parliament; therefore, so long as the opposition party is not promoting the dispute or directly representing dissident groups, it is potentially the only democratically elected group that can act as an intermediary. This could also be the case in a presidential system in which the executive is drawn from the same party that holds a majority in parliament. By acting as third party intermediaries, opposition parliamentarians may be able to instigate confidence-building measures, which are essential pre-conditions to fostering negotiation among conflicting groups. In order to achieve this though, opposition parties and the executive must be willing to work together to resolve conflict across party lines. As noted above, this would depend on the enabling environment, party politics in parliament and the willingness of the

government to forgo acrimonious politics so as to develop a national consensus in the spirit of reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

Parliament is a forum that utilizes dialogue and discussion to find workable solutions for problems within communities that satisfy, to a greater or lesser extent, all parties. However, in order for parliament to reach its potential as a peacebuilding and conflict prevention forum it is imperative that the institutional design of parliament and the electoral system results in a representative outcome that facilitates broad-based participation in the democratic process. A representative parliament is important, as it is better able to contribute to peacebuilding by bringing together representatives from all groups in society who, by working together, start to develop a common vision that accommodates the interests of all groups.

Every parliamentarian has the capacity and opportunity to represent the broad interests of their constituency and society in general in conflict prevention and poverty reduction. For this reason, when engaging in peace processes, parliament should develop a political consensus so that it can speak with one voice on important issues and provide continuity between election cycles. Opposition parties and members can contribute to conflict prevention, not only by working toward a consensus and creating continuity but also by acting as a bridge between the conflicting groups and the government.

## Unit 2 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. How does meaningful participation and representation in parliament contribute to conflict prevention?
2. Taking into consideration your own conflict-affected country or a conflict-affected country of interest, what objectives do you think its electoral system should ideally seek to achieve and why?
3. What type of electoral management body is in existence in your conflict-affected country or a conflict-affected country of interest and what are its functions? How could the electoral management body be reformed in order to improve the transparency of elections?
4. What can opposition parliamentarians, in their representative capacity, do in order to contribute to peacebuilding?
5. Why should parliament seek to avoid building a relationship with the media that is adversarial or too close?

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## Unit 3: Advancing Parliament's Legislative Function in Conflict-Affected Societies

### Learning Objectives

#### What are the particular challenges of parliaments in conflict-affected countries?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate the importance of building a culture of cooperation within parliament;
- Identify strategies for creating a parliament in which all Members of Parliament can and do work together to fulfill the functions of parliament;
- Understand how parliament can contribute to conflict prevention when undertaking its law-making function;
- Discuss the content of the legislative agenda parliament can encourage and support in order to promote peace.

### **Introduction**

Parliaments perform certain core functions that define their role in a working democracy, irrespective of the type of democratic system by which they were elected and in which they operate. Broadly speaking, parliaments perform three main functions: representation, creating laws or legislation and exercising oversight. Different parliaments around the globe perform many additional functions depending on the type of democratic system the parliament is capacity and resources, and the responsibilities and constraints placed on parliament by the constitution of the country. This unit focuses specifically on how parliaments in conflict-affected countries conduct their legislative business and make laws.



This unit will address how former antagonists who have become Members of Parliament (MPs) can best work together to conduct legislative business. In addition, this unit looks at the process of conducting parliamentary business in conflict-affected countries, whether through debates in the parliamentary chamber or through the committee system. The roles that certain actors play in the conduct of parliament's legislative business will also be analyzed, notably the role of political parties and presiding officers.

### **Building a Culture of Cooperation in Parliament**

As a precondition for parliamentarians being able to conduct their business, members must respect parliament as an institution, and exhibit a willingness to work together to solve common problems. For this reason, before seeking to conduct parliamentary business, whether on the floor of parliament or in committees, any potential animosities that exist need to be addressed. Only after parliamentarians from previously hostile factions reconcile to work together through the political process can they build relationships across party lines and beyond their original group allegiances. For parliament to exercise a leadership role in a broader reconciliation process, parliamentarians themselves need to be able to work together. Parliament must consider confidence-building measures between the governing party and the opposition. The level of confidence between different sides of parliament can be bolstered, for example, by ensuring transparency in decision-making, placing greater importance on the committee structure, and above all, ensuring that all parliamentarians participate in parliamentary business, rather than sidelining certain groups or members.

### **Codes of Conduct**

A non-partisan parliamentary "code of conduct" that reflects parliament's standing in the community should be developed to establish a standard of conduct expected from members when in and out of parliament. Codes of conduct are basic documents written in easily understood language that set forth broad goals and objectives that legislators

seek to achieve and outline the principles of proper conduct. A code of conduct can also set out expectations on how parliamentarians should conduct themselves in relation to one another, namely with respect and in the spirit of cooperation. Breaches of the code are referred to the Presiding Officer, or Speaker, a parliamentary committee on standards or privileges, or some other complaints mechanism.

## **Rules of Procedure**

Parties are most partisan during parliamentary debates and for this reason the procedures for debates need to be transparent, well defined and closely adhered if this forum is to serve as a conflict management tool rather than a place to merely entrench the positions of conflicting parties. The rules of procedure that determine how to conduct the business of parliament and define the relationship between the majority and minority parties, should be fair and applied impartially. Discussions of bills should not be blocked by majority parties, and legislation should not be passed without debate or, when important legislation is being considered, without referring it to committee. This is particularly important when the executive belongs to the majority party in parliament because without proper debate parliament is unable to fulfill its oversight and accountability function. Sometimes, though, despite the best intent parliament has little choice but to pass legislation quickly, particularly when the executive holds some legislative power. In such instances parliament is powerless to fulfill one of their functions.

The rules of procedure provide the framework within which parliamentarians voice their concerns on the floor of parliament, and ensure that focus remains on the issues at hand. Clear rules of procedure and subsequent structured debate facilitate parliaments' peacebuilding efforts by moving issues of contention between groups in the community away from the point where violent conflict could erupt to a more orderly debate about the issues. If rules of procedure are not enforced parliament runs the risk of parliamentary debates degenerating into personal attacks rather than focusing on important policy considerations. Political parties have a vital role to play in ensuring that the floor of parliament reaches its potential as a forum for peacebuilding.

## **Committee Deliberations**

Though there are a number of ways parliaments and parliamentarians are able to contribute to peacebuilding, the most notable is through the committee mechanism. There is no single model for the conduct of parliamentary committees. Some countries include the type of committee structure in their constitutions, whilst others have sectoral committees and other countries instigate *ad hoc* specialized public interest committees.

The decision-making process within committees lends itself to consensus decision-making. This occurs when issues are brought before the committee and are resolved through compromise. The committee system enables committee members to bring the specific concerns of their constituents to the decision-making process. In addition, the absence of the public and the media during private negotiations often makes it easier for parliamentarians to make compromises across party lines. This process helps parliamentarians to focus on the substance of the issues without having the pressure to perform in front of a broader audience.

Committees not only contribute to compromise and consensus building, but also provide oversight of the executive by reviewing the budget and examining the conduct of ministers in both presidential and parliamentary systems. In order for committees to be effective, irrespective of the form of the committee structure, parliamentarians who are members of the committees and representatives of the people should be free to question any entity from government.

Parliamentary committees operate as effective peacebuilding models, particularly committees that are issue specific, as they ensure the conflict moves from a people-centered approach to a debate about the issues. Furthermore, parliamentarians who have constituencies that are specifically concerned about certain issues, for instance rural communities or minority ethnic and religious groups, are able to bring their concerns to the table and ensure that a compromise solution is reached. In this way parliamentary representatives working in the committee structure are able to work towards satisfying the concerns of their constituents about issues that directly affect

them. If the main concerns of all the groups with a vested interest are satisfied there will be no incentive for those groups to resort to violent conflict in order to have their interests met. Furthermore, a successful consensus outcome will act as an incentive for those same groups to continue using parliament as a means of resolving conflicting interests in future.

The size of the committee also has an impact on its effectiveness. Reaching a unanimous committee position across party lines on prospective legislation is far more influential than when a minority report is issued and, in general, the fewer the members on a committee, the easier it will be able to arrive at a consensus position.

Parliaments utilize committees to fulfill their major functions – representation, lawmaking and oversight. This unit looks at how committees in conflict-affected countries can go about lawmaking, in particular, reviewing bills and investigating issues, so as to ensure that legislation contributes to conflict prevention and poverty reduction. Similar to the structure of parliamentary committees, the role committees have with respect to amending government bills varies widely from country to country; from merely making recommendations for amendments to having the power to reject government bills or initiate their own bills.

Parliamentary committees operate as effective peacebuilding models, particularly committees that are topic or issue specific. Committees may be less adversarial and able to ensure that conflict moves from being centered on people and personalities to a debate about the issues – therefore they are more constructive in developing solutions. Committees utilize less formal rules of procedure than those used during debates on the floor of parliament and the committee mechanism provides an opportunity for members to devise compromises that may reconcile partisan differences. Parliamentarians who have constituencies with special concerns and needs, for instance rural communities or minority ethnic and religious groups, are able to voice their concerns in a more focused environment where it is easier for their voices to be heard and where they can work with other parliamentarians to find a compromise solution. If the main concerns of all groups with vested interests are satisfied, there will be little incentive for those groups

to resort to violent conflict to have their interests met. Furthermore, a successful consensus outcome will act as an incentive for those same groups to continue using parliament as a means of resolving conflicting interests in the future.

The interests of divergent groups can be brought to the attention of the relevant parliamentary committee, not just by each group's representative in parliament, but by direct submissions from the group to the committee. Committees also enjoy an advantage over the full parliamentary chamber in that they are smaller, and therefore more mobile. As long as the security situation permits, parliamentary committees in conflict-affected countries can conduct hearings throughout the country, traveling to regions where legislation or initiatives may have a pronounced or specific impact. Holding hearings in the community takes the work of parliament to the people, thereby building greater public confidence in parliament as an institution and allowing greater input from those affected by the legislation. Such feedback, in conjunction with parliamentarians providing views and information from the groups they represent, is integral to ensuring that parliament is truly responsive to the needs and wishes of all segments of society. If divergent segments of the community have confidence in parliament and their concerns are heard and considered by the committee during decision-making processes, those same groups will be far more likely to accept the outcome, even if it does not meet all their expectations.

## **Legislative Development**

Aside from providing a forum for the discussion of divergent views, parliament can assist the peacebuilding process by seeking to establish the legislative and institutional framework to help prevent further conflict. When given the opportunity, parliament should pass legislation that creates an environment assisting peacebuilding by encouraging a more accountable and informed system. This type of legislation is usually introduced by the executive but an effective parliament can promote its introduction and, indeed, provoke it through effective political action. In order to

develop an informed and accountable democracy the *Principles for an Informed Democracy* suggests governments and parliaments should:

- Pass freedom of information legislation
- Resist privacy legislation that could be used to suppress freedom of speech and the media
- Apply parliamentary privilege fully to all fair and accurate reports of parliamentary proceedings, including committees
- Reject or repeal legislation to license media, journalists and presses
- Repeal criminal defamation laws so that the media is no longer subjected to punitive controls that curb freedom of expression
- Exercise caution in the passage of anti-terrorism legislation which may limit society's freedom or make the state less accountable; and
- Reject or repeal laws that empower the state to censure or punish political opponents and the media for partisan reasons.

In addition to ensuring that legislation is passed to develop an informed and transparent environment, parliaments can further promote peacebuilding by facilitating the introduction and adoption of legislation that protects fundamental freedoms. For instance, after obtaining its introduction by the executive parliament can, , pass laws that entrench and strengthen human rights protections, minority rights guarantees, and nationality legislation. Entrenching such protections demonstrates a willingness on the part of the government to take the role of minority groups seriously within society at large. These types of initiatives promote peace by creating an environment where aggrieved parties feel they have a resolution to a conflict, other than by resorting to violence. For instance, if a member of a minority group faces discrimination from government officials s/he will be able to seek redress in accordance with the legislation protecting rights. As such, it is important that along with passing the requisite legislation, parliament also encourage the formation of agencies and programs to implement and enforce these protections, such as human rights commissions. Many of these legislative initiatives traditionally fall within the ambit of the executive's responsibility. However, parliament, as the direct representatives of the people, can

promote the introduction of such legislation and seek to make it as robust as possible when it is introduced by the executive.

## **Conclusion**

Parliamentarians are able to contribute to conflict prevention and poverty reduction while performing their law-making function. However, before they are able to achieve this goal it is imperative that they build a culture of cooperation in parliament. Unless parliamentarians exhibit a willingness to work together they will be unable to conduct their legislative business and work together to solve common problems. A non-partisan parliamentary “code of conduct” that reflects parliament’s standing in the community should be developed in order to assist the development of a culture of cooperation.

Once a cordial working relationship has been created between the Members of Parliament, parliament can then seek to advance the interests of conflict-prevention and poverty reduction using the legislative process. In order to develop legislative outcomes that contribute to these goals it is important for there to be clear procedural rules for debates in the chamber. Parties are at their most partisan during parliamentary debates and for this reason the procedures for debates need to be transparent, well-defined and closely adhered if this forum is to serve as a conflict management tool rather than a place to merely entrench the positions of conflicting parties. Another forum where legislative business is undertaken is in committees. The decision-making process within committees lends itself to consensus-making. This is when issues are brought before the committee and resolved through compromise. It therefore acts as an excellent venue for conflict prevention. Parliamentary committees operate as effective peacebuilding models, particularly committees that are topic or issue specific, as they ensure that the conflict moves from a people centered approach to a debate about the issues.

Aside from providing a forum for the discussion of divergent views, parliament can assist the peacebuilding process by seeking to establish the legislative and institutional

framework to help prevent further conflict. In particular, parliament can seek to develop an informed democracy, where human rights are promoted and reconciliation achieved.

### Unit 3 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. What can Members of Parliament do to build a culture of cooperation in parliament?
2. What is the difference between codes of conduct and ethics rules?
3. How can parliamentary rules of procedure help turn adversaries into peacebuilders?
4. How do committee deliberations contribute to peacebuilding efforts?

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## Unit 4: Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight to Prevent Conflict and Reduce Poverty

### Learning Objectives

#### What does oversight have to do with conflict?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate how parliamentary oversight contributes to conflict prevention and poverty reduction;
- Identify which oversight committees are pivotal in preventing conflict and reducing poverty;
- Understand how parliament can use autonomous accountability institutions to aid it perform its oversight function;
- Discuss what parliament can do in order to strengthen the performance of autonomous accountability institutions.

### **Introduction**

This unit considers parliament's oversight function and how, in fulfilling this function, parliaments can help reduce conflict. Parliament's oversight function aims to ensure that the government and its agents use their powers and available resources appropriately and with probity to respond to the needs and interests of all members of the community. In exercising their oversight role, parliament helps to manage tensions that could escalate into violent conflict. Furthermore, oversight by parliament and other autonomous accountability institutions can assist in guaranteeing that the decisions and actions of the government stay within the bounds of the law, thereby strengthening an open and accountable democracy. Ultimately, oversight enhances public confidence in the integrity of the government's activities and encourages all groups in the community to accept the policies of the executive branch, rather than resorting to violent conflict.

## **Direct Parliamentary Oversight of Government**

There are a number of ways parliament can provide oversight to directly keep the government and public officials accountable. One of the most important tools at their disposal is the parliamentary oversight committee. Other tools include questioning Ministers on the floor of parliament at question time, conducting public hearings and inquiries, promoting the independent, adequate staffing of supreme audit institutions, anti-corruption commissions, and other specialized agencies. Another tool to support oversight is to promote a diverse media landscape, ensuring the protection of journalists, the support for freedom of information legislation and media accountability. Parliamentary oversight committees have the potential to contribute to conflict prevention by: (i) ensuring that the policies and actions of the government are responsive to public demand; and (ii) being aware of how their work reinforces the public's belief in the integrity of the government. Two types of committees essential for parliament to fulfill its oversight function and encourage peace and stability in conflict-affected countries are: (a) specialized financial, or "money" committees which provide oversight of the budgetary process; and (b) parliamentary committees that provide oversight of the security sector so as to strengthen democratic control of the military, police services and intelligence sector.

### **Public Accounts Committees**

Much of the influence exercised by parliaments stems from their control over the financial resources required to implement governmental policy decisions. Parliament has an obligation to ensure that the spending measures it authorizes are fiscally sound, match the needs of the population with available resources, and that they are implemented properly and efficiently. There is a tendency for the executive to draft the budget behind closed doors. Therefore, the first opportunity for the budget process to be open and accountable occurs when the budget is tabled in parliament. When the

budget comes before the Public Accounts Committee it is often the first opportunity for an inclusive public debate on its content.

In order to facilitate public debate and ensure transparency and accountability, proceedings before Public Accounts Committees should be open to the media and the public. As with other committees, parliamentarians who are members of the Public Accounts Committee should solicit submissions from civil society, academics, research institutions and community groups to aid in their oversight function. By drawing upon the social and intellectual capital of the community at large, and by facilitating greater participation, parliamentarians can strengthen their oversight of decision-makers. An added benefit is that witnesses appearing before the Public Accounts Committee will be in a position to assist the Public Accounts Committee in disseminating information about the budget process and the committee's deliberations to the broader community.

The ability of parliaments to oversee and influence the budget process differs from country to country. Some parliaments have the ability to formulate and substitute a budget. Others can influence the budget by amending or rejecting the budget. Still others are only permitted to rubber stamp the budget placed before parliament. The degree of influence parliament has over the budget process is often attributable to whether a country has a presidential or parliamentary system. Generally in a parliamentary system relations between the parliament and the executive are cordial and more cooperative as the executive is dependent on the majority support of parliament. As such, rewriting the government's proposed budget would be the equivalent of a vote of no confidence in the government. In presidential systems, on the other hand, the political future of the executive is not as intricately intertwined with the majority in parliament, so there is no guarantee that the executive and the majority in parliament are of the same political persuasion or even that the executive has developed a strong working relationship with the majority in parliament. In situations where the political future of the executive and the majority in parliament are not directly linked there is a greater likelihood that parliament would be willing to amend the budget.

In either case, even a minimal amount of authority to amend or reject portions of the budget, no matter how small, can generate a great deal of influence. For instance, rejecting certain expenditures frees up revenue to be spent on other priority line items. Even being able to exert a limited amount of influence over the budget means the executive, in order to ensure a smooth transition through parliamentary approval, will be more willing to consult parliament's views prior to tabling the budget. During consultations parliament can seek to ensure that the budget is fiscally sound and balances the needs of all constituents, thereby mitigating catalysts that could escalate conflict.

Public Accounts Committees are able to provide oversight of budget decisions at two stages. Decisions with respect to the overall fiscal discipline and allocation of revenue to different policy priorities can be scrutinized during the approval process when the budget comes before parliament, such as in the United States and Nigeria. The operational efficiency of the budget can only be scrutinized after the budget has been implemented and the Public Accounts Committee is in possession of the auditor's reports. Some parliaments are able to scrutinize the budget at both stages, such as the German *Bundestag*, whilst some can only provide effective oversight at one stage. At which stage parliamentary oversight is provided, effective oversight of the budget provides an opportunity for parliaments in presidential and parliamentary systems to attempt to ensure that the budget addresses the needs and interests of all stakeholders, thereby helping to manage points of friction that could generate conflict.

## **Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector**

It is well recognized as an international norm, having been included in the Warsaw Declaration and subsequent United Nations reports that in a functioning democracy a country's military must remain accountable to the democratically elected civilian government. From the perspective of conflict management, a security sector that does not operate to provide security for citizens in a legitimate fashion, and is not democratically accountable is not only unable to prevent conflicts that occur but can also

be a source of violence. Therefore, one of the most important tasks a parliament can perform is to assist the executive in its exercise of control over the security sector, thereby providing not just civilian control over the security sector but also democratic oversight, which can only be provided by the parliament as the direct representatives of the people.

Oversight of the security sector has traditionally been vested with the executive, which has the ultimate responsibility for the proper operation of security institutions. The security sector constitutes all state institutions and agencies that have the legitimate authority to use force, to order force or to threaten the use of force. Recently the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development delineated which agencies constitute core security actors to include the armed forces, police, gendarmeries, paramilitary forces, presidential guards, military and civilian intelligence, and security services, coast guards, border guards, customs authorities, reserve and local security units, such as civil defense forces, national guards and militias within the definition.

Until recently parliament did not play a major role in the oversight of the security sector and has often been excluded from any involvement in the sector. Critics of parliamentary oversight usually cite parliaments' time-consuming procedures and protocols, lack of expertise on security issues, its lack of access to all the requisite intelligence needed to make an informed decision, and concerns over its ability to keep classified material secret, as reasons why security sector oversight should be solely in the realm of the executive. However, as argued by Born and Fluri, if the objective is to bring the security sector under not just civilian control but also democratic control, then parliamentary oversight is essential. Furthermore, these obstacles to effective parliamentary oversight can be overcome and, in a growing number of instances, have been. Accordingly, there is a growing movement for greater parliamentary oversight of the security sector.

Parliament can provide oversight in a number of ways, including review of the security sector budget, debates of security sector bills on the floor of parliament and recommendations for amendments, and providing input on the security issues which

constitute the highest concern for the community. Government has an obligation to provide security for the people, but also has a corresponding obligation for policy-makers and security forces to be accountable to the people for their actions and use of public resources. In turn, if parliament does provide legitimacy to the decisions and actions of the security sector by providing democratic oversight it is then obligated to help disseminate information to the community about the governance of the sector and the justifications for the decisions made or actions taken.

### **Autonomous Accountability Institutions**

There is little doubt that the responsibility for overseeing the activities of the government is a massive undertaking that requires extensive resources and often specialist knowledge. Parliaments are able to turn to an array of autonomous accountability institutions to aid them towards providing oversight of government agencies and public officials. Autonomous accountability institutions take many forms and are designed for a multitude of purposes, whether addressing corruption, protecting human rights or resolving complaints that individuals have with respect to the conduct of government officials. Examples include anti-corruption commissions, ombuds offices and human rights commissions.

No matter the model or the purpose of each autonomous accountability institution considered, there are a number of general lessons that can be garnered by examining the performance of these institutions over the years. In particular, these institutions will have a far greater chance of succeeding in their mission if they are given operational independence, conferred with sufficient powers to perform their allocated functions, sufficiently resourced, supported by strong political will, accountable to parliament rather than to the executive, and headed by people who have high standing in the community and are known for their integrity.

## Conclusion

Parliament's oversight function aims to ensure that the government and its agents use their powers and available resources appropriately and with probity in ways that respond to the needs and interests of all members of the community. Parliament can perform its oversight function with an eye to managing tensions that could escalate into violent conflict. Oversight can be provided directly by parliament, usually through parliamentary oversight committees, or indirectly through autonomous accountability institutions, which are dependent on parliament to reach their potential as independent oversight mechanisms. Oversight of decision-makers guarantees that the decisions and the actions of the government stay within the bounds of the law, thereby strengthening an open and accountable democracy, whilst enhancing public confidence in the integrity of the government's activities. Public confidence in the government encourages all groups in the community to accept the policies of the executive branch, rather than resorting to violent conflict.

### Unit 4 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. What contribution can parliamentary oversight committees make to conflict prevention and poverty reduction?
2. What role can the Public Accounts Committee play in encouraging conflict prevention?
3. What is the difference between civilian control and democratic control of the security sector?
4. What factors are essential for the success of autonomous accountability institutions?

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## Unit 5: Social Accountability – Civil Society and the Media Working With Parliament

### Learning Objectives

#### What can civil society and the media do for parliament?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate how civil society can help parliament perform its accountability function;
- Understand the role that the media plays in aiding the flow of information required to keep decision-making accountable;
- Identify what parliament can do to help the free flow of information.

### **Introduction**

Civil society is the network of organized, self-governing and autonomous organizations operating at the national, regional and international levels. Civil society groups can take the form of trade unions, environmental groups, women's groups, human rights organizations, religious organizations, the media, professional associations and community-based organizations. Unlike parliamentarians, civil society organizations often do not have a direct mandate to speak on behalf of the people whose interests they seek to represent, but rather on behalf of an organizational mission. These organizations are often viewed by the executive and parliament as hostile because they are often critical of government.

Conflict arises between groups because of misunderstandings, ideological differences, ignorance or the lack of credible information on which conclusions are drawn by decision-makers. As such, it is beneficial for parliament to encourage the development

of a healthy and robust civil society with which it can establish a dialogue in order to build trust and improve the flow of information between parliament and groups in society so as to overcome any misunderstandings. Particularly in less developed countries direct engagement between parliamentarians and their constituencies is often hampered by limited financial resources, the distance between the capital and their constituencies, and poor transport and communications. By turning to civil society and the media, parliamentarians can help overcome many of the barriers that would normally inhibit their ability to engage with their constituents.

## **Civil Society**

Civil society organizations represent either specific groups or specific issues and serve as an excellent conduit of information between those groups and the government or as a source of information about the issues on which civil society groups concentrate. The better informed parliamentarians are on the issues, the better they will be able to respond and ensure the actions of parliament contribute to peacebuilding rather than to fuelling cleavages already present in the community. Civil society should act as a reservoir of knowledge on the topics on which parliament deliberates and can be drawn on by parliamentarians to assist them in their role. On the flipside, parliament can use the same channels of communication to explain to the community the reasons behind parliament's action or inaction on certain issues. The community will only be willing to accept the stance taken by parliament on certain issues if they understand the reasons why parliament acted the way it did. The greater the acceptance in the community of the stance adopted by parliament on different issues, the less likely those issues will act as a catalyst for conflict.

In addition to their ability to facilitate information flow, civil society often comprises traditional institutions of authority, for instance, trade unions and professional associations; therefore civil society can contribute to the peacebuilding process by assisting with dialogue and cooperation in inter-community relations. Parliament can seek to enlist the support of institutions of authority in the community to build consensus and contribute to peace-building.

Civil society organizations are usually demand-driven in that they form to represent the interests or provide services to groups within society who have specific interests that are not otherwise being addressed. In this way they help give voice to those who may not be able to be directly represented in parliament, thereby facilitating greater participation by the populace in governance. For this reason civil society has an important role to play in making society and decision-making more inclusive. However, inclusiveness does not automatically contribute to peacebuilding; parliamentarians should not only recognize that civil society facilitates greater inclusion, but should be responsive to the interests of those groups in the community that are being represented by civil society organizations. If parliament works toward having previously unrepresented groups' interests met there is less of a likelihood that a point of friction will escalate to violent conflict.

It should be noted, though, that the benefits that a robust civil society can bring to the peacebuilding effort is contingent on the existence of a friendly regulatory environment and the free flow of information between parliament and civil society. Complex registration requirements for civil society organizations, complicated taxation systems which are hard to comply with, as well as other unduly harsh regulatory requirements act as disincentives for the formation of new civil society organizations or the continuation of established organizations. Furthermore, complex regulatory environments draw the attention of organizations away from their stated mission in order to focus more attention on compliance with regulatory requirements rather than providing services or representing the interests of specific groups.

Through their legislative and oversight functions parliaments can seek to promote an environment that is conducive to a robust civil society. Parliament can also strengthen the lines of communication between itself and a robust civil society through greater legislative-civil society interaction in the form of public hearings and electorate visits. Parliamentarians should also be more willing to engage with civil society when approached, as civil society is a conduit through which parliamentarians can engage with their constituencies in a way that would not normally be possible, considering the

constraints imposed on many parliamentarians in conflict-affected countries due to a lack of resources.

## **The Media**

One segment of civil society that should be singled out for special attention is the media. The media plays a vital role in aiding parliament with its peacebuilding function. In particular, the media can muster public support or opposition to decisions made by parliament by disseminating information about the decisions made, such as the evidence parliamentarians considered when deliberating on issues, such as submissions from the community to parliamentary committees and testimony from representatives of relevant government departments, and the published reasons for the decisions. Furthermore, the media has the ability to act as a social barometer, channeling information to parliamentarians about public perception and opinion on the innumerable number of issues parliament must consider.

In order to facilitate the media's important role in peacebuilding, parliamentarians should seek to create an environment in which the media sector can operate without undue interference. Parliament can assist the media in performing their vital functions by ensuring the availability of governmental and non-governmental information – or more precisely, parliament needs to ensure that the media has access to the information that is required in order to perform their function, as well as the freedom to report and discuss this information. Finally, in order for the media to reach its potential as a peacebuilding actor it needs to be made aware of the importance of its role. Parliamentarians can assist by explaining to the media how it can support parliament in its peacebuilding function or by encouraging greater media training by donors and multilateral development agencies.

Parliaments can help facilitate the free flow of information, particularly by passing right-to-information legislation and putting in place the regulations, procedures and institutions that enable people to access information in a timely and cost-effective

manner. The ability to readily access information held by the government helps counter any potential information deficits in the community regarding the issues that parliament is considering. The ability to access pertinent information provides upward pressure on the demand for information, transforming society into a community that is eager to know more. An information-rich society aids parliament in its peacebuilding efforts by helping the public understand the reasons behind laws enacted and policies implemented; especially those laws and regulations that impinge upon the interests of some groups. Greater access to information by the media and the general public promotes more in-depth analysis and discussions, which similarly aids parliament in explaining the complex reasoning behind sound law and policy making.

The independence and quality of the media impact directly on its ability to fulfill its role as a disseminator of information and as a commentator. A number of factors determine the independence of the media, most notably the:

- Ownership structure of the media;
- Economic structure of the industry, economic conditions and the availability of financing;
- Laws regulating production and access to information, entry into the media industry and content; and
- Policies regarding industries related to the media.

In some countries, State-owned media enjoy a monopoly over the flow of information. In such instances it is imperative that the State-funded media agency does not act as an extension of the ministry of information; rather it should run according to a public service charter that affirms its independence and ensures that it is free from political or economic interference. Furthermore, if the State has a monopoly over the media, then a diverse and responsible media sector should be encouraged.

In order to create an environment that is conducive to the media and to ensure that journalists are meeting their potential as conduits between parliament and the broader community, restrictions on freedom of expression should be lifted. Any remaining restrictions need to be justified by a nation's international obligations stemming from the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or any other complementary regional declarations and treaties and the interpretation of these obligations by authoritative institutions such as United Nations Human Rights Commission and Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict often arises between groups because of positions adopted by decision-makers and parliament that are based on misunderstandings, ideological differences, ignorance or the lack of credible information. As such, it is beneficial for parliament to encourage the development of a healthy and robust civil society with which it can establish a dialogue in order to build trust and improve the flow of information between parliament and groups in society so as to overcome any misunderstandings. By turning to civil society and the media, parliamentarians can help overcome many of the barriers that would normally inhibit their ability to engage with their constituents. Furthermore, civil society can act as a reservoir of knowledge and, in turn, parliament can use civil society and the media to explain parliament's actions or inaction on issues to the community. If the public understands the reason parliament acted the way it did there will be greater acceptance of the positions adopted by parliament, making it less likely these issues will act as a catalyst for conflict.

## Unit 5 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. In what ways can civil society help parliamentarians engage with their constituents?
2. How can parliament improve legislative-civil society interactions?
3. How can the media help parliamentarians undertake outreach to their constituents?
6. What can parliament do to create an environment in which the media can operate without undue interference?

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## Unit 6: Regional Parliamentary Peacebuilding and Engagement with International Organizations

### Learning Objectives

#### How can international networks help parliament handle conflict?

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Appreciate that professional regional and international parliamentary associations provide a venue for parliamentarians to focus on issues beyond the domestic;
- Identify ways in which parliamentarians can use parliamentary association to promote conflict prevention;
- Understand how parliamentarians can participate in international initiatives sponsored by multilateral development agencies to reduce poverty and improve development.

### **Introduction**

There is a growing recognition that parliamentarians, as direct representatives of the people, have a regional, and sometimes international, role to play in peacebuilding. Traditionally, parliamentarians' focus has been limited to representing their constituents within parliament on any number of issues, but predominantly domestic topics. More recently, parliamentarians are finding that they are able to represent the interests of their constituents in forums outside parliament, which have not traditionally been within parliaments' purview, such as international initiatives and processes sponsored by multilateral development agencies. Furthermore, by looking beyond their lawmaking and accountability functions, and working with parliamentary colleagues across international borders, parliamentarians can make contributions to peacebuilding and conflict prevention either in their own countries or regionally, through encouraging dialogue, building confidence and facilitating peer to peer learning.

By forging informal networks or participating in regional and international parliamentary associations, parliamentarians can have an impact on regional or international issues. Such forums or associations promote dialogue among parliamentarians from different countries and serve as an excellent peacebuilding and conflict prevention model, especially when disputes cross international boundaries. Parliamentary associations are uniquely qualified for this purpose, as those involved have specific knowledge about how parliaments work and the strengths and limitations of parliaments. Similarly, formal regional institutions promote dialogue, build confidence and facilitate learning between members of a region, while helping to mediate disputes and provide a neutral space for dialogue.

Parliamentarians across regions face similar hurdles when using their position and the institution itself to manage conflict and build peace. One aspect of peacebuilding is developing relationships between actors who can then work together to avert escalation of conflict, building on the trust that exists between them due to their similar professional standing. Parliamentarians are able to forge regional relationships amongst themselves in three ways:

1. Developing informal networks
2. Joining and participating in professional associations, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC), Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB); and
3. Participating in formal regional institutions, such as the East Africa Legislative Assembly, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum Parliamentary Assembly.

### **Challenges faced by Parliaments when developing Regional or International Relationships**

Parliamentarians do face some challenges in developing regional relationships, particularly because of the duplication of efforts by some overlapping associations and

networks, and the diversion of scarce parliamentary resources needed to participate in these networks away from other priority areas. Those challenges should be taken into account; however, they should not hinder the development of regional relationships, which is at the core of peacebuilding activities. Unlike other stakeholders and representatives, parliamentarians are well placed to develop beneficial and long-lasting relationships between one another at a regional level.

## **Parliament Representing Community Interests in Initiatives Undertaken with Multilateral Development Agencies**

Parliamentarians' representative role extends beyond their responsibilities in parliament. Traditionally, the executive has dealt with international organizations and multilateral development agencies; however, due to their representative nature, parliaments are now seen as vital democratic institutions that are playing a larger role in international initiatives and processes sponsored by the multilateral development agencies. For the first time, parliamentarians are able to directly represent the interests of their constituents in major forums and processes outside of parliament.

Parliaments can participate in international initiatives and processes with multilateral development agencies working to reduce poverty and increase levels of development. Specifically, parliaments can contribute to such initiatives by assisting with design, oversight, and implementation. Initiatives undertaken in conjunction with multilateral development agencies include coordinated attempts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Global AIDS initiative, multilateral trade negotiations, the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) and the country-driven Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process work undertaken by the World Bank. As previously discussed, reducing poverty and increasing levels of development pay a peacebuilding dividend. There is a growing realization in the development community that implementing international initiatives becomes more successful with broader stakeholder involvement in the consultation, design and implementation phases of such initiatives. Parliament is uniquely positioned to participate as a key stakeholder in its own right, as

well as being the democratic representative of various other specific stakeholders, in all three phases.

It is not unusual for parliaments to routinely — but indirectly — contribute to national initiatives undertaken in conjunction with multilateral development agencies. Whether parliamentarians wish it or not, the legislature is often a default stakeholder in national initiatives since it may be required to approve or facilitate such enterprises. For instance, in some countries, projects initiated between the executive and international organizations, such as the World Bank, are subject to parliamentary approval through ratification or, more commonly, through indirect approval via the budget process. Furthermore, parliaments are sometimes required to pass legislation to aid the implementation of international initiatives, such as in Poland, where parliament was required to amend the public finance law in order to enable municipalities to accept loans from a World Bank Municipal Development Project.

The necessity for parliament to approve or facilitate the implementation of many of these international initiatives provides it with an opportunity to engage with the process in a more robust manner than may already be the case. The most obvious way in which parliaments can engage is through its oversight function. Even when parliament's oversight function has not been specifically tasked with respect to one of these international projects, parliament is nonetheless able to provide oversight via the budget process or through the creation of particular committees devoted to monitoring the specific initiative, whether it be the MDGs, Global AIDS initiative or poverty reduction. Parliament can provide input on the implementation particularly because of its role in assessing government policy and suggesting policy adjustments to decision-makers in line with budget constraints.

However, parliamentary engagement can go beyond just oversight; it is just as important for parliament to engage at the consultation and formulation stages of these international initiatives and to institutionalize its own ongoing participation. Participating in the earlier stages ensures that parliamentarians will be better able to represent the interests of their constituents in the development of these initiatives. Furthermore,

participatory processes tend to yield more sustainable results, and as a major stakeholder, parliament should be consulted prior to the formulation of these initiatives. For instance, with respect to the PRSP process, the World Bank and partnering countries generally accept that national strategies should involve a participatory process, and should provide the basis for debate in the countries' national assemblies or other elected bodies. When participating in such initiatives, parliamentarians are able to minimize conflict by ensuring the direct inclusion of socially vulnerable and marginalized groups, who are often more likely to be affected by conflict. Parliament can seek their inclusion either by representing their interests or by encouraging the direct inclusion of these groups during the consultation stage. To ensure that parliament is able to represent the interests of socially vulnerable groups, parliamentarians need to engage with their constituencies through outreach activities, public hearings and by ensuring that the public has ready access to easily comprehensible information about the issues and processes.

In addition to playing a role in participatory consultation processes and helping to formulate international initiatives, parliamentarians can contribute to the ongoing management of such initiatives and should seek to institutionalize greater participation by parliament and civil society in ongoing processes aimed at reducing poverty and increasing growth, whether through budgetary processes or in the outcome of the process itself. For instance, parliament can urge the executive to create a steering committee, with stakeholder representation, tasked with implementation and ongoing management of the initiative. As mentioned before, parliament has a strong claim to be included: it is a stakeholder in its own right, the executive is often dependent on it to approve or implement the initiative, and it is the democratic representative of the population at large, including the many vulnerable groups that are often precluded from participating in such processes. For these reasons parliament should urge the executive to include bipartisan parliamentary representation on any such steering committee. By ensuring that the formulation and implementation of international initiatives are sensitive to the interests of divergent groups and potential causes of conflict, parliaments can contribute to peacebuilding whilst promoting sustainable development.

It should be noted that a parliament's capacity to live up to these heady engagements is often contingent on its having the capacity and knowledge to tackle these complex processes and issues. In order to acquaint themselves with how other parliaments have engaged with similar projects, parliamentarians in conflict-affected countries should seek to learn from the experience of other countries in their regions that have undertaken similar processes. Further still, parliamentarians can turn to one of the many parliamentary organizations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB), the Inter-Parliamentary Union or European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA), to aid in their engagement and improve their knowledge so that they can reach their potential as representatives of the people.

## **Conclusion**

It has been a long held belief that the role of parliament and parliamentarians was merely to pass legislation and provide oversight, mostly over the budget process. However, there has been a growing trend for parliamentarians to look beyond their traditional functions in order to embrace broader responsibility in representing the interests of their constituents in peace and poverty reduction. Parliamentarians' growing understanding of the role they can play and the positive and constructive contribution they can make to these lofty goals has led to increasing interest by parliamentarians in participating in regional and international professional associations and forums. Parliamentarians are able to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention by encouraging dialogue, building confidence and facilitating peer to peer learning. There are challenges to developing regional relationships, such as duplicating efforts or using scarce parliamentary resources to build networks and relationships outside their traditional constituencies, but the benefits that can accrue from developing informal and formal networks cannot be underestimated. The case-studies in this chapter illustrate how parliamentarians are able to represent their constituents' interest in peace and contribute to conflict prevention by participating in different regional and international forums.

Parliamentarians do not necessarily need to look beyond their borders when seeking to more proactively represent their constituents' interests in peace and poverty reduction. Participation in initiatives sponsored by the multilateral development agencies, such as the MDGs, the Global Aids Initiative, and the World Bank PRSP process, provide forums outside of parliament in which parliamentarians can give their constituents a voice and represent their interest in peace and prosperity. Whether parliamentarians are representing the electorate in regional and international forums or engaging domestically driven initiatives supported by international organizations, they are now able to look beyond the traditional confines of parliament's role to better represent the interests of the people in conflict prevention and poverty reduction.

### Unit 6 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

7. How can parliamentarians contribute to conflict preventions by participating in professional parliamentary associations and regional institutions?
8. What parliamentary associations and regional parliamentary institutions are available to parliamentarians in your conflict-affected country of interest?
9. What challenges are faced by parliamentarians who are seeking to foster regional or international relationships?
10. How can parliamentarians engage with initiatives sponsored by multilateral development organizations in order to promote poverty reduction and development?

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## Glossary

- Conflict:** The pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups.
- Conflict-affected country:** Narrowly defined, often means those countries that have recently experienced, are experiencing, or are widely regarded as at risk of experiencing violent conflict.
- Government:** The government or executive is theoretically responsible for working with the bureaucracy to implement the legislation passed by the parliament. In parliamentary systems the executive is dependent on the direct or indirect support of the parliament often expressed through a vote of confidence; whereas, in a presidential system the executive is dependent on a mandate usually conferred directly by the electorate.
- Parliament:** Parliament is a representative assembly or body, at whichever level, comprised of members who are either elected or appointed in conformity with the laws of a sovereign state, which convenes to debate and vote on proposed laws. Parliament can be used interchangeably with the term *legislature* or *congress* and can refer to either unicameral or bicameral parliaments.