



Centre for Democratic Institutions

**INTER-PARLIAMENTARY
UNION SEMINAR**

**IPU Headquarters
Geneva
8—13 November 1999**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is an organisation that offers enormous benefit to its member parliaments. Central to the work of the IPU are regular Conferences designed to bring together parliamentarians from each of the IPU's 137 member parliaments. In 2000 Indonesia will host the 104th IPU Conference.

Recognising the importance of the IPU, and the need for parliamentarians to understand its structures and functions, the Centre for Democratic Institutions agreed to a request from the Indonesian Parliament to sponsor one staff member to attend the *IPU Information Seminar on the Structure and Functioning of the IPU*, held in Geneva in November 1999. The Information Seminar was designed for parliamentary staffers, in order that they be better able to provide members of their national parliament with the information necessary to access, interact with and utilise the benefits offered by the IPU.

CDI considered it particularly important that the Indonesian Parliament have greater knowledge of the structure and functions of the IPU, given that Indonesia will host a forthcoming IPU Conference.

Below is a report of the Information Seminar, written by Ms Endah Retnoastuti, who was funded by CDI to attend the Seminar.

REPORT

on

**INFORMATION SEMINAR ON THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF
THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

IPU Headquarters, Geneva
8-13 November, 1999

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Background

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the world organisation for legislatures, with a membership of 137 parliaments. It is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative institutions. The IPU has two permanent bodies: the Conference and the Council (plenary policy-making body). The Inter-parliamentary Conference is held twice a year (the Spring session in April/May and the Autumn session in October/November) bringing together some 600 parliamentarians to study international problems and make recommendations for action. In addition, the IPU holds specialised meetings in co-operation with various UN bodies.

The IPU Conference is a strategic forum to promote international diplomacy through parliamentary channels. It addresses all issues of interest to the international community and promotes improvements in parliamentary institutions. The official conference outcomes are in the form of resolutions and calls for action.

In Indonesia, delegations attending any inter-parliamentary meeting are required to send all reports and resolutions to the related House Committees, in the hope that the Committees will raise these issues with the government. The reports and resolutions are also sent to the appropriate Ministers for follow up.

Seminar for parliament staff

The IPU Information Seminar for parliamentary staff is held annually. In 1999 the seminar was attended by fourteen participants from fourteen parliaments ([click here to view the list of participants](#)).

The aim of the seminar was to brief the administrative secretaries or staff of the national group secretariat on how to assist national delegations and foster their effective participation in IPU Conferences. It also offered a chance for the participants to exchange views and experience about the development of their respective parliamentary secretariats.

Activities

Ten IPU officials, including the Secretary General of the IPU, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, led the six-day seminar. Participants discussed key issues and explored their experience of the working and structure of IPU. The question sessions were dynamic, with lively participation, particularly on the issues of contribution fees and what each national group can gain from IPU meetings and conferences. Other sessions considered the meetings of women parliamentarians, the relationship between the IPU and UN bodies, and programme for the study and promotion of representative institutions. [Click here to view the Seminar programme](#).

I was particularly interested in the meeting of women parliamentarians. The IPU's statutes require that each national delegation include one women parliamentarian.

Moreover, the meeting of women parliamentarians is a permanent body of IPU, which ensures that there is a gender perspective in IPU recommendations. The idea behind the establishment of this meeting is the awareness that gender partnership is fundamental to democracy.

Apart from the discussion, we also had presentations on parliamentary website, library and archives. Most parliaments are familiar with the IPU website, but only a few of them take advantage of it for parliamentary study.

During the seminar the participants toured the IPU headquarters and gained an insight into the IPU's work, which includes preparing working papers and agendas for meetings, and undertaking the administrative work of liaising with 137 member parliaments. Most of the participants were quite surprised to learn that, despite its workload, the IPU headquarters is staffed by only 32 people. We were impressed by their efficiency and competence.

The importance of understanding the structure and functioning of IPU

IPU members can request the inclusion of particular items on the Conference agenda. For example, for the 101st Conference, held in Belgium, included seminars on "the metropolitan problem: a global challenge" and "world economic models" led by experts and government officials. In preparing the Indonesian delegation for IPU Conferences, the secretariat of the Indonesian Parliament (the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR), prepares a guide book containing the statements and positions of the DPR on agenda items and other information related to the conference.

Despite the careful preparation, some members still encountered difficulties in operating effectively at the Conference. The confusion is understandable as there are several simultaneous committee meetings, as well as other meetings conducted in parallel with the Conference, including meetings of geopolitical groupings, Islamic countries, and the ASEAN group.

To assist in overcoming these difficulties, briefing for the next Indonesian delegation to an IPU Conference will include issues of form as well as substance. This will include information on:

- the structure of committee meetings
- how to be a member of the drafting committee
- the aims of working committees, specialised, subsidiary committees
- how to input into IPU recommendations
- how to become member of subsidiary committees, such as the sustainable development and human rights committees

Briefings should also explain the importance of networking at the Conference, as an important aspect of the Conference is the establishment of bilateral or multilateral contacts, beyond the formal meetings.

Other advantages of attending the seminar

My participation in the seminar not only broadened my understanding of IPU mechanisms, but also provided me with ideas to develop my Division. Suggestions include :

- To maintain any development/follow up of IPU resolutions, whether in the form of policy, law or actions produced by the government and DPR. Previously we only undertook the administrative process, such as sending the report and resolutions to relevant parties, but without monitoring follow up.
- To keep the MPs, especially the members of inter-parliamentary co-operation committee, informed of developments in other parliaments that may be useful for DPR comparison.
- To actively inform the IPU of developments within the DPR, as the IPU is the major source for members of the international community seeking information on Indonesian legislature.
- As it is also important to disseminate information on the DPR ourselves, our Division is starting to provide information on the DPR in English. Presently, we have a DPR website, but it is only in Indonesian language.
- The 104th IPU Conference will be held in Jakarta in October 2000. In preparation, my division head, who has attended similar seminar, and I plan to make two presentations on IPU: one for the leaders of DPR, which will be presented by the Secretary General and one for the DPR staff who will assist in organising the conference.

Conclusion

The seminar was designed to meet the needs of the parliamentary staff. This year seminar was the first time conducted over one week, rather than the usual two-week period. Consequently we had a very intense – but enjoyable – week. Some of the participants suggested that the seminar may have been improved by the use of audio-visual aids. A visit to the Swiss parliament, as a comparative study, would have also been useful. Some participants from an oral tradition requested that an IPU information video be produced, since their MPs are very unlikely read IPU documentation.

I would conclude that attending the Information Seminar for parliamentary staff, particularly those working in the area of inter-parliamentary relations, was very helpful and practical. When the staff are well equipped, they can better assist members of parliament gain maximum benefit from membership of the IPU and from attending its Conferences. As the members of parliament who attend IPU Conferences change over time, an informed and capable staff is essential if MPs are to be well-prepared and well-brief.

Finally, I would like to once again thank Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) in Canberra for giving me this invaluable opportunity and understanding the advantage of sending a parliament staff to the information seminar.