

Canadian Group  
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien  
Union interparlementaire

## **SUMMARY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

### **JUNE - AUGUST 2020**

**PREPARED BY**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Executive Committee (ExCom) held four virtual meetings (11, 18 and 26 June 2020 and 9 July 2020) as part of its 283<sup>rd</sup> session and one virtual meeting (31 August 2020) as part of its 284<sup>th</sup> session. The meetings allowed for the consideration of items previously scheduled for discussion ahead of the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly, which was cancelled, as well as new items, including the way the organization has responded to, and been affected by, the COVID-19 pandemic. The four ExCom members from the Twelve Plus Group, IPU Vice-President Mr. D. McGuinty (Canada), Mr. M. Grujic (Serbia), Ms. C. Widegren (Sweden), and Ms. L. Fehlmann Rielle (Switzerland) participated in the meetings. This document summarizes the discussions held and key decisions taken during the ExCom's 283<sup>rd</sup> and 284<sup>th</sup> sessions.

## FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

### A. REPORT FROM THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

As interim chair, Mr. A. Abdel Aal (Egypt) presented the report of ExCom's Sub-Committee on Finance via a written statement, due to his inability to participate in the meetings. He reported that the external auditor had given an unqualified audit opinion with no new recommendations for 2019, finding that the financial statements were of a high quality and that the IPU was in sound financial health. Mr. Aal reported that the IPU's internal auditor, Mr. R. del Picchia (France), was also satisfied with the IPU's financial position and the work done by the external auditor. Mr. Aal agreed with these opinions and commended the IPU Secretariat on its financial management of the institution.

Mr. Aal stated that the reception of assessed contributions in the early months of 2020 was steady, implying there was, so far, no evidence of a pandemic-related revenue shortfall. Mr. Aal noted that, per IPU rules, any savings related to the pandemic or other sources would be put in the Working Capital Fund and allocated at the discretion of the IPU's Governing Bodies. Mr. Aal was cautious in discussing potential savings for 2020, reminding the ExCom that savings from cancelled physical events were at least partially offset by expenses related to hosting virtual events and the Secretariat's transition to teleworking.

Ms. Cecilia Widegren (Sweden) was elected the new Twelve Plus representative, and subsequently Chair, of the Sub-Committee on Finance. The committee's other members are Mr. A. Abdel Aal (Egypt), Ms. P. Krairiksh (Thailand), Ms. A. D. Mergane Kanouté (Senegal), Mr. J. P. Letelier (Chile), and Mr. A. Saidov (Uzbekistan).

### B. 2020 BUDGET

At the meeting on 11 June 2020, the Secretariat reported that, to date, the IPU had saved approximately 530,000 CHF (approx. \$773,800 CAD) due to the cancellation of events because of the pandemic. The Secretariat later provided a written summary of expected cancellation-related savings for 2020, forecasting a budget surplus of approximately 1 million CHF (\$1.46 million CAD) by the end of the year. The projected surplus is attributed primarily to the cancellation of the two IPU Assemblies and the decision to move the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (WCSP) to a virtual format.

Members of the ExCom raised the possibility of a reduced assessed contribution in 2021 and discussed how to make the IPU budget more cost effective and results oriented, including by reducing the budget for IPU missions and hiring consultants and contractors. The Secretariat reported that dues will not increase in 2021. Members also discussed how to increase voluntary contributions and the role of the ExCom in this respect.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

### **C. FALL 2020 ASSEMBLY**

Following the ExCom's initial meeting on 11 June 2020, the Parliament of Rwanda informed the IPU that, due to the pandemic, it would be unable to host the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly in October 2020. Rwanda stated it remained interested in hosting an IPU Assembly, offering to host the Assembly scheduled for October 2021.

At the request of the ExCom, the Secretariat prepared different scenarios under which the IPU could convene in some form in fall 2020. Members were canvassed for their views on holding a physical, virtual or hybrid meeting. Following thorough discussion, the ExCom decided that a virtual meeting of the Governing Council would be held from 1–4 November 2020. The ExCom created a working group mandated with examining the modalities for holding a council session virtually, including the implications for the agenda and the presidential election. Members emphasized the importance of respecting the principles of inclusivity and gender equality and ensuring that procedures are consistent with the IPU's Statutes and Rules.

Current IPU President, Ms. G. Cuevas Barron (Mexico), stated that she intends to end her mandate prior to the next session of the Governing Council, scheduled for November 2020, as her three-year term in office expires on 18 October 2020. As such, it is expected that IPU Vice-President of the Executive Committee, Mr. G. Chen (China), will chair the virtual session.

### **INITIAL REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP**

At the 9 July 2020 meeting, the working group presented a summary of its discussions. The group decided to recommend that the 2021 IPU budget and elections for the IPU Presidency and ExCom vacancies be prioritized as agenda items, while also recommending that the WCSP Declaration and discussion of an IPU post-pandemic strategy be considered as agenda items. It also agreed to seek legal advice on possible changes to the Governing Council Rules or the Statutes of the IPU required to hold a Governing Council session virtually ahead of the working group's next meeting to inform discussions.

### **APPROVAL OF WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS**

At the meeting held on 31 August 2020, the ExCom was presented with the working group's final recommendations and proposals. These included a draft version of special rules of procedures for the virtual session and proposed technical provisions for the holding of elections for the IPU Presidency and ExCom through an online voting system. ExCom members reviewed and amended the proposals submitted by the working group. Particular attention was paid to assuring candidates for the presidency were guaranteed opportunities to engage with IPU members, including by adding candidate presentations to the Governing Council agenda. Careful consideration was also given to the

oversight of the online voting system, by both tellers nominated from among IPU members and by an external auditor.

## **D. WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

The ExCom endorsed the recommendation of the WCSP Preparatory Committee to hold the 5<sup>th</sup> WCSP in two phases: a virtual phase with a reduced program on 19 and 20 August 2020; and an in-person phase in Vienna in 2021. The ExCom will recommend to the Governing Council that it give the existing preparatory committee a mandate to prepare for the second phase of the WCSP. As previously noted, the move to a virtual format is expected to result in budget savings in 2020. These savings are not expected, however, to offset additional expenses arising from the physical event in Vienna in 2021.

## **E. FUTURE ASSEMBLIES**

In addition to Rwanda offering to host the October 2021 Assembly in Kigali, Morocco has offered to host the March 2021 Assembly in Marrakesh and Indonesia has offered to host the April 2022 Assembly. These offers are subject to Governing Council approval.

## **COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS**

### **F. UN75 DECLARATION**

Following a request from the IPU, several parliaments approached their respective missions to the United Nations (UN) to encourage them to propose amendments to the draft UN75 Declaration that would make more prominent reference to the role of parliaments. The draft declaration has since been finalized without the inclusion of amendments proposed by the IPU and was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2020.

### **G. INDEPENDENT REPORT ON IPU–UN RELATIONS**

Following the decision in Belgrade to commission an independent report on the IPU's relationship with the UN, the consultant hired for the task presented his preliminary findings to the ExCom. During his study, the consultant, [Greg Power](#), carried out numerous interviews at both the IPU and the UN and found that the IPU has broad support within the UN system. He emphasized that the IPU offers the UN a unique combination of political and policy expertise and recommended that the IPU's strength of generating synergies at the local, national, regional and global levels should be maximized. He also noted that the IPU's access to the UN system stems primarily from its membership and the oversight role played by parliaments.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### **H. TRANSPARENCY REPORT**

The consultant hired to provide an independent evaluation of the IPU's transparency procedures, [Malika Aït-Mohamed Parent](#), presented her findings. The consultant emphasized that the IPU has a good structure on which to enhance its commitment to transparency, accountability and openness. At the same time, she recommended that many procedures be updated, new procedures be established, and a comprehensive strategy be developed and reviewed on a five-year basis. She emphasized data

protection and digitalization as key priorities for the future, along with the consideration of an independent oversight mechanism and means of promoting more succinct information sharing.

The ExCom agreed to establish a working group comprising one representative from each geopolitical group in order to further examine the report's recommendations and propose an implementation plan for the ExCom's consideration. Mr. D. McGuinty (Canada) was nominated as the Twelve Plus's representative for the group.

## **I. IPU PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

During the 9 July 2020 meeting, the IPU President presented her activities report. ExCom members raised concerns regarding a section of the report which detailed problems she had identified with the management of the IPU and the work of the Secretariat. The ExCom requested that these concerns be kept within the organization, and not reflected in public versions of the report. It was also decided that the transparency report working group would be tasked with further investigating the President's allegations.

## **J. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The Secretariat presented a mid-term report on its communications strategy (2019–2021). Focused on digital engagement, the Secretariat found that the IPU's new strategy had significantly increased traffic to its website and viewings of its online videos, as well as generally enhancing its social media presence.

## **K. 2020 IPU ACTIVITIES**

The Secretary General presented a summary of activities the IPU has undertaken since the outbreak of the pandemic. Although the pandemic has made in-person meetings impossible, the IPU has continued to serve parliaments, including through the publication of pandemic-related information and guidance, the organization of meetings of the IPU's various bodies (including the High Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and the Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians), and the provision of technical assistance and capacity building to individual parliaments using virtual tools.