

Basics of a UN Parliamentary Assembly

Context: Globalization and related efforts to shape global policies make democracy deficits at the international level more and more visible and significant. Wide cross-sections of the public do not feel sufficiently represented by their government in international institutions and negotiation processes.

Purpose: The basic purpose of a UNPA is to address this democracy deficit by including the citizens into global decision-making through elected officials and thus to be a truly representative voice of global public opinion.

Establishment: There are two possible routes to establishment: Firstly, a UNPA could be set up by a vote of the UN General Assembly under Article 22 of the UN Charter. Secondly, it could be created on the basis of a new international treaty between governments followed by an agreement which links it to the UN. Neither mechanism requires Charter reform.

Powers: Initially, a UNPA could be endowed with largely consultative functions. In further steps it should be vested with genuine rights of information, participation and oversight with the view of eventually developing into a principal organ complementing the UN General Assembly.

Legal scope: Initially the UNPA could be attached to the UN General Assembly and the UN's Secretariat. Step by step, legal ties should also be established with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the UN system, peacekeeping operations and the economic and financial institutions of the Bretton Woods system.

Political scope: The range of political issues that the UNPA would be entitled to deal with would be defined similarly to that of the UN General Assembly, as set out in Article 10 of the UN Charter. A UNPA thus would be able to "discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter."

Composition: In a first phase the UNPA could be composed of members of national and possibly

regional parliaments. Their selection would have to reflect the political composition of the dispatching parliaments. In the long run, partial or complete direct election of its members is intended. The distribution of seats should take into account population distribution. Other factors affecting seat distribution are also under discussion. Concrete numbers will have to be negotiated between governments. It has been suggested that the upper limit may be at around 900 delegates.

Inclusiveness: A UNPA needs to be inclusive and open to parliamentarians from UN member states which possess constitutionally mandated national parliaments.

Independence: UNPA statutes may have to allow for secret and independent voting among the individual delegates, and discourage governments from influencing or instructing them.

Inter-Parliamentary Union: The IPU and a UNPA would be complementary. The IPU is an association of national parliaments that assists them to improve their oversight at the national level in matters of global nature. The UNPA's purpose, by contrast, is to exercise parliamentary functions directly at the global level in its own right. There is currently no sign that the IPU is interested to take over such a capacity.

Costs: The actual financial needs and the sources to meet them can only be quantified once the details of the UNPA's design are fixed. An initial estimate on the basis of a consultative body composed of national MPs amounts to 100 to 120 million €/year.

Support: The UNPA proposal is supported across principal party lines on all continents. In particular, the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin American Parliament and the Senate of Argentina so far have adopted resolutions. The Campaign for the Establishment of a UNPA coordinates the efforts internationally. Its appeal is endorsed by supporters from over 130 countries, among them around 600 MPs, 200 professors and 150 NGOs (July 2009).

Website: www.unpacampaign.org.