

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CO-OPERATION WITHIN GEOPOLITICAL REGIONS: THE AFRICAN AND WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCE

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General debate moderated by Mr. Samuel Waweru Ndindiri,
Clerk of the National Assembly (Kenya)

Mr Samuel Waweru Ndindiri (Kenya) *spoke as follows:*

OVERVIEW

There is great value to be gained when parliamentarians share information, experiences and lessons learned in their onerous duty. The knowledge gathered is useful in strengthening national Parliaments and parliamentary networks. Regional cooperation among Parliaments may serve as a stocktaking forum on a variety of issues, including political, economic and social matters. Further, action taken to honour the commitments made in international and regional fora, which are today more exposed and accordingly followed, demands the involvement of Parliaments, and many issues addressed by Parliaments at the national level have an international dimension.

Parliamentary diplomacy has therefore emerged as a major ingredient in addressing the challenges of the 21st Century. Parliaments and their members are progressively embracing increased responsibility in international relations and playing a more active role at the national, regional and global levels.

The constitutional mandates vested upon Parliaments continue to offer thrust to regional cooperation by closely seeking to influence and linking the national and global concerns through various ways. Firstly and foremost, participation in regional cooperation equips Parliaments with adequate knowledge to seek to influence their respective country policies on matters dealt with in the regional and other international negotiating fora besides being informed of the progress and outcome of these negotiations.

Multilateral fora should further serve as the rallying point to encourage member countries to ratify relevant international and regional treaties, conventions and protocols of issues affecting them. This equips national Parliaments with a competitive edge to actively press their respective governments to sign, accede to and ratify these international instruments as well as involvement in the subsequent implementation process.

Parliaments' involvement in regional cooperation will thus be effective in promoting some aspects of governance, such as accountability, advocacy, networking, partnership and general progress review.

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CO-OPERATION WITHIN GEOPOLITICAL REGIONS:

The main outputs of the regional inter-parliamentary cooperation within geopolitical regions are :

- Facilitation of effective implementation of regional policies and projects ;
- Promotion of principles of human rights and democracy within the regions ;
- Provision of a forum for discussion on matters of common interest to the geopolitical regions ;
- Promotion of peace, democracy, security and stability on the basis of collective responsibility by supporting the development of conflict resolution mechanisms in the various geopolitical sub-regions;
- Contribution to a more prosperous future for the peoples of the regions by promoting collective self-reliance and economic efficiency;
- Hastening of economic cooperation and development integration in pursuit of equity and mutual benefit;
- Strengthening regional solidarity and building on the recognition of the common destiny for the people of the region;
- Encourage good governance, transparency and accountability in the region and in the operation of regional institutions;
- Facilitate networking with other organizations of parliamentarians;
- Promote participation of non-governmental organizations, business and intellectual communities in the geopolitical region activities;
- To study and make recommendations on any issue in order to facilitate the more effective and efficient operation of the geopolitical region's institutions, including the harmonization of laws.

The outstanding examples of inter-parliamentary cooperation within geopolitical regions in the African continent are the SADC Parliamentary Forum, Pan African Parliament and the African Parliamentary Union. In addition there is the West African, IGAD parliamentary forums.

THE SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

The SADC Parliamentary forum is a regional organization that brings together 12 Parliaments of the southern Africa region and represents 1800 Members of Parliament. Among the Forum's critical issues of concern in the 21st century is the support of the growing democracy in the region. The forum is motivated by the fact that for many years, the peoples of the region have fought and struggled for democracy and human right against forces, institutions and socio-economic and political bodies that limited or completely deprived them of democracy, human rights, and civil liberties.

THE AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY UNION

The African Parliamentary Union (APU), formerly known as Union of African Parliaments, is a continental Inter-Parliamentary organization set up in Abidjan in February, 1976. Its Statutes were modified and adopted during the 22nd Conference which took place on 17 and 18 September 1999 in Luanda, Angola.

APU is a privileged framework for parliamentary dialogue and for promoting peace, democracy, good governance, sustainable development and social progress in Africa. At present, there are 35 National Parliaments members of the APU. The APU Parliaments work closely with UNESCO. This enables the Organization to mobilize a powerful network of national and regional legislators, meeting at times within regional or international forums, which are receptive to its ideals and wish to ensure that its programme objectives are reflected in national legislation. Entrusted with responsibility for making and applying their nation's political and legislative decisions, they relay the concerns of those who have mandated them and can adopt appropriate measures by way of response. World wide experience indicates the main parliamentary bodies in Asia, Europe, Caribbean and South America

The need to act collectively towards finding solutions to regional challenges in the 21st Century cannot be gainsaid. Inaction, with its destabilizing consequences is certainly not the best option. Parliament, as the institution which legitimately represents society in its diversity and is accountable to it, should have a permanent role in the regional cooperation process. This will not only provide a forum to interpret the concerns and aspirations of the people, but also ensures that decisions and international agreements effectively find their way to national legislation.

In the changing global context, no Parliament should remain isolated. The challenges of the 21st Century are closely inter-linked with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Multilateral interactions serve as suitable avenues for sensitising parliamentarians share experiences and best practice. Dimensions and initiatives of regional cooperation such as human rights, democratic order and conflict prevention are crucial in driving the human agenda and in making coordinated efforts and approaches towards solving global problems. This ensures legitimacy and precludes overlap and duplication of effort. They are a crucial ingredient to the parliamentary transition process besides nurturing a strong bond among Parliaments.

Mr Mamadou Santara (Mali) made the following contribution entitled *"Inter-parliamentary Co-operation in Africa : a new experience for African Parliamentary staff"*

In our session last April in Manila, our colleagues from Sweden, Italy, and Romania gave a very good explanation about various examples of inter-parliamentary cooperation between parliaments in Europe. We were able to establish that various types of inter-parliamentary cooperation existed and that they basically competed to "exchange information and support Parliamentary scrutiny in all areas of competence of the European Union and to ensure the efficient transaction of Parliamentary business relating to European questions, especially in the area of control of subsidiarity by national parliaments".

Another aspect of this inter-parliamentary co-operation deserves to be underlined, and this is what I wish to examine by way of reference to the network for African Parliamentary staff: the African Network of Parliamentary Staff (the French acronym is RAPP).

I. HISTORY

The initial idea for the creation of an association of African Parliamentary staff arose in May 1995 in the course of a study trip to the United States. African parliaments represented on this study trip included those from Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger.

The idea developed in later meetings, notably at Porto-Novo in Benin, organised by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in September 1995. Mr John Martin, formerly Speaker of the House of Representatives of the State of Maine, at that time agreed to support this project.

The representatives from Niger were tasked to prepare a draft terms of reference for the network which we planned to establish in order to encourage technical co-operation between African Parliaments. However, for various reasons, particularly linked to political instability which then prevailed in Niger, the project was greatly delayed.

It was only much later, thanks to the persistence of various members of the staff of the parliaments of Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Madagascar and Mali, that the idea was taken up again with energy at a meeting organised again by the NCSL to finalise the basic texts of the organisation: the aims of the association and internal rules.

A committee composed of representatives of those parliaments present at that meeting in Bamako was established with the task of preparing for the general constituent assembly of the network. This took place at N'Djamena in August 2003 with the participation of 60 delegates from 15 countries.

The aims of the Network:

- Education of Parliamentary staff;
- Continuing increase in professional capacity;
- Inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The conference at N'Djamena marked the official establishment of the Network. Five delegates who were Secretaries General of their Parliaments were elected to pre-

side over the organisation with a mandate of two years. Our colleague from Chad was elected president.

The RAPP was therefore created in August 2003 at N'Djamena by the representatives of the Parliaments of 15 countries. Its principal objective is inter-parliamentary cooperation from the point of view of Parliamentary staff in the geographical area of Africa.

In addition to its members, Parliamentary staff, the network is also open to associate members.

This latter category is aimed at including substantial people from Parliamentary or academic life who are interested in Parliamentary law and inter-parliamentary discussions, whether this is from the point of view of Parliamentary diplomacy or that of staff training or even may include anything which contributes to the support of the capacities of Parliamentary institutions.

The RAPP, which holds a General Assembly each year in a different country (N'Djamena, Madagascar, Ouagadougou) is led by a Bureau of five members elected from the Secretaries General of Parliaments who belong to the Network. This bureau of five members is elected for two years.

The other organs of the Network are made up of the committees – four in number. These are:

- Committee on finance and the budget;
- Committee on basic texts;
- Committee on communication and development;
- Committee on study and training.

II. ORGANISATION AND METHOD

The programme for the General Assemblies combined plenary sessions with simultaneous workshops, working in Committee and Round Tables with colleagues. This creates problems of coordination of timetables.

The use of evaluation forms gives information on the interest which the different subjects raise among participants.

For example, at the General Assembly in Tananarive (19-23 August 2004), the participants evaluated the meeting according to the following scale: 5 = very satisfactory; 4 = satisfactory; 3 = average; 2 = unsatisfactory.

— Workshops :

- Political analysis 3,63
- Government scrutiny..... 3,60
- Educational policy 3,92
- Programme for new parliamentarians 3,90
- Environment policy 3,56
- Links between Parliament and academics 3,59

— Plenary sessions :

• On USAID.....	3,63
• On the Pan-African Parliament.....	3,66
• On NEPAD.....	3,70
— Committee work.....	3,62
— Round Tables with colleagues.....	3,77

The marks given to the different programmes by the participants reflect their interest in the activities of the RAPP, which seems relatively satisfactory.

III. PERCEPTION OF THE EVENT AS IT BECOMES MORE ESTABLISHED

Holding the General Assemblies of the RAPP allows the host countries to show interest and the highest authorities are involved in organising the event in order to offer the best welcome possible to delegates.

The opening of the second General Assembly at Tananarive was honoured by the presence of the following VIPs:

- The Speaker of the Malagasy National Assembly
- The Prime Minister, Head of the Government;
- The Vice-President of the Senate, representing the Speaker of the Senate;
- Members of the Bureau of the two Chambers;
- The Mayor of the City of Antananarivo;
- The Charge d' Affaires of the United States Embassy to Madagascar;
- The Ambassador of Algeria to Madagascar;
- The Representative of UNDP in Madagascar;
- The Director of Programmes of the NCSL (USA).

The Grand Opening was made with a lot of ceremony and an important speech. In this way, and also as result of the receptions for delegates, the meetings of the RAPP included a political aspect which was not expressly part of its original objectives.

IV. MEANS

- Subscriptions
- Charges for individuals to participate in the sittings of the RAPP
- Voluntary contributions from sponsors and Honorary Members
- Material support from the NCSL (the US State Department), by way of assistance with the secretariat and publication of the RAPP periodical, creation of a web site to promote exchanges between members on a permanent basis.

V. SPECIFIC AIMS

The inter-parliamentary co-operation which the RAPP advocates is based on Parliamentary colleagues, organised in networks, within a given geographical space, which is different in kind from the inter-parliamentary co-operation which prevails within the European geopolitical area, according to what was told to us in the communications made by other colleagues on the subject.

In the same geopolitical area where the RAPP is developing there is a proposal to create a body of serving officials in the 15 member states of the CEDEAO with a view, among others, to increase convergence and harmonisation of the rules and procedures of parliaments. The main aim of this is to contribute to the promotion of good democratic governance in this area of the world by support for the community Parliament, the inaugural sitting of which took place in Bamako (Mali) in 2000 and the President of which is at present Mr Ali Nouhoum Diallo, Secretary General of the Parliament of CEDEAO.

The experiment which RAPP is carrying out involves cooperation between basic officials. The professional discussion relates to themes based on the daily work of ordinary staffers: staff management, Parliamentary procedure, technical support for Members of Parliament, conduct of sittings, research work etc.

In addition to this didactic aspect which profits all members of the Network, there is also the possibility for them to discuss any kind of subject, even outside sittings of the Association. The Network has a web site and an interactive forum which allows communication between staffers of the various Parliaments almost in real time.

VI. OTHER TYPES OF INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CO-OPERATION

In the West African area there are traditional relationships between our various Parliaments and those of the North, in particular with France for historical reasons. In addition to working visits and Parliamentary discussions, the National Assembly of France organises regional seminars in Africa for the benefit of various parliaments in the same geographical area. The first of this kind took place in 1995 in Bamako and the last has just taken place, between 4 to 8 July 2005, again at Bamako (to mark the 10th anniversary of this event which each time has brought together delegates from a dozen Parliaments).

As was said in our session in Manila, there are also training courses for Parliamentary staff which the French Parliament (National Assembly and Senate) organised in Paris in co-operation with the National School for Administration (ENA). Formerly, this training had taken place at the International Institute for Public Administration (IIAP) which had as much enjoyment as now because of its combination of professional and tourist interests.

Nowadays, with globalisation and its linked liberalisation of all means of exchange, the area of inter-parliamentary co-operation is also entering a new phase which increasingly will involve the administration of Parliamentary understanding relating to international tenders arising from the establishment of consortiums of Parliaments of

the sort that had already happened within the European programme TACIS (established for the Parliament of Georgia).

Here can be seen unexpected effects of globalisation, the impact of which has not yet been fully understood. On this subject, I would like to make a remark in parenthesis – the recent news obliges me to – simply to raise a matter which constitutes to my eyes at any rate an aberration arising from globalisation: I want to speak of the humanitarian problem of illegal immigration which has affected my country in the past week. As far as I understand, globalisation permits free movement - in particular that of capital in the tradition of economic liberalism. At the same time globalisation as it affects freedom of movement of people – in particular those of migrants – awakens national selfishness and emphasises the sovereignty of States which leads to the shocking spectacles which have recently been seen in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melina. This is not the moment to debate this in detail although we are all affected by this situation but I simply wish to mention it in passing.

To return to our subject, I would like to conclude by saying that inter-parliamentary co-operation has become well established in the geopolitical area of West Africa. This co-operation can be found in many areas and is a reflection of the policy adopted by each Parliament. If it is to be effective, it requires strict coordination to allow the various forms of it Parliamentary cooperation which take place in the same geographical area to coexist harmoniously and contribute to the high quality training of human resources in Parliaments in order to support good democratic governance.

Mrs Adelina de Sá Carvalho (Portugal) *made the following contribution, entitled: "Portuguese Speaking Community: Community of Portuguese speaking Countries (CPLP) and Forum of Portuguese-speaking Countries"*

The formation by the Heads of State and Government of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) in July 1996 aimed at the progressive international assertion of the group of Portuguese-speaking countries which are located in a geographically discontinued area, though identified by their common language: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor.

Protecting the principles of peace and law, of democracy and Human Rights, of development and cooperation, as well as the existence of a common past and language, are the solid values of the CPLP in a shared goal of integration in an international society. It is to stress that there are more than 200 million speakers in this linguistic community.

The formation of the CPLP was also motivated by the different national parliaments' identical purpose to establish a solid and participating inter-parliamentary co-operation. This was achieved by the First Conference of Speakers held in Lisbon in March 1998 and by the First Meeting of Secretaries-General of Portuguese-speaking Parliaments which took place also in Lisbon in January 1998.

The Constitutive Declaration of the CPLP sets forth as one of its objectives "to encourage the development of inter-parliamentary cooperation actions"

Thus, this is the starting point for the Presidents of the Portuguese-speaking Parliaments to establish the Forum of Portuguese-speaking Parliaments, which introduced the true inter-parliamentary dimension within the Portuguese-speaking community.

The Forum is the best form of guaranteeing the establishment of democracy and development in the area of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries. Its functioning requires a high parliamentary cooperation and it is a relevant progress in the parliamentary relations of all Portuguese-speaking countries.

Some goals to be reached by the Forum of Portuguese-speaking Parliaments are as follows: to encourage peace and to strengthen democracy and the representative institutions; to collaborate on good governance and the consolidation of the rule of law; to promote and protect Human Rights; to analyse issues of common interest, namely with a view to intensify cultural, educational, economic, scientific and technological cooperation, to fight all forms of discrimination and all types of trafficking.

The Forum also wishes to keep computer communication networks on a permanent operation and free access basis, as privileged spaces for inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The parliaments represented at the Forum began to have a word not only about issues concerning their own area, but also about matters regarding the international community in which they are integrated and where they should have an active voice.

The Forum is composed of three bodies: the President of the Forum, the Conference of the Presidents of Parliaments and the Inter-parliamentary Assembly.

The Forum Presidency is rotating and annual and it is presently held by the President of the Brazilian Congress. The Conference holds an ordinary session once a year in the country holding the Presidency of the Forum at the moment and it is composed of the Presidents of the national parliaments. The Inter-parliamentary Assembly also meets annually and it is composed of the Presidents of parliaments and the national groups, which are composed of five Members of each parliament.

The last Forum meeting took place in Brasilia in January 2005 and the issues under discussion were the dissemination of the Portuguese language and its diffusion within the international organisations, the fight against HIV/AIDS and the use of new technologies in the parliaments. The forthcoming Forum meeting will take place already in November in Angola.

In a world so interdependent and global as the present one - a world of large institutionalised spaces - it is important to use the potentialities of the inter-parliamentary dialogue.

The community of Portuguese-speaking countries has today real possibilities to be asserted as an active response to the modern integration and globalisation tendencies.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION WITHIN PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Protocols, Programmes of Parliamentary Cooperation and the Association of Secretaries-General of Portuguese-speaking Countries

Being aware of the role played by the respective bodies that exercise sovereign power in the establishment of democracy and in encouraging the citizens' participation in the consolidation and modernisation of the rule of law, the Portuguese-speaking parliaments have set different active cooperation mechanisms: Protocols and Programmes of Parliamentary Cooperation.

These mechanisms have put into practice parliamentary cooperation between the Portuguese Parliament and the parliaments of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor.

They not only lead to the strengthening of friendship ties and solidarity relations but also to the consolidation of parliamentary structures. These are raised to a much higher level of operation and development than what simple annual action plans would possibly achieve.

Parliamentary cooperation developed by the Portuguese Parliament occurs autonomously of governmental policies, i.e. the Assembly of the Republic has always recognised the need to develop actions which would lead to the dissemination of the values of parliamentary democracy and to the consolidation of a Human Rights culture, in a common historical context which integrates its own linguistic community.

The Portuguese Parliament has taken an active role in forming a solid basis in inter-parliamentary relationship, by exchanging experiences and knowledge at the technical and administrative level of the parliamentary activity, and through the direct intervention in this domain of the Secretaries-General of the Portuguese-speaking parliaments.

Therefore, there is a consolidation of the role of Parliaments – the essential pillar in the democratic system – and that has gained a major importance if we consider the democratisation process in the Portuguese-speaking countries, namely in the countries with more recent democracies or in the assertion process.

Parliamentary cooperation, supervised by the Secretary-General of the Assembly of the Republic, is accomplished through pluri-annual cooperation programmes including projects with highly technical contents.

The technical assistance missions executed by the Assembly of the Republic at the Portuguese-speaking Parliaments are multidisciplinary. However, in the first years, the cooperation actions focused on the development of the services providing technical support to the plenary and the committees and of the financial management of the parliamentary institution.

These actions are completed through specific missions which adjust the content of the project to the specific reality of each country, by requesting the services of Portuguese parliamentary technical staff or of the Resident Expert, who acquires the know-how in the Portuguese Parliament and later develops his/her career in the Parliament of his/her country.

After the consolidation of the mentioned technical areas, the contents of the parliamentary cooperation programmes have evolved towards the new computer and communication technologies.

The Assembly of the Republic presently wishes to enhance the level of demand of the parliamentary cooperation in two different aspects. The first one aims at encouraging the exchange of experiences between the various services of the Portuguese-

speaking parliaments, not only by organising inter-parliamentary training courses but also by developing a common website. All participant countries are responsible for the input of the site.

The second aspect is to bring the Portuguese-speaking civil society closer to its parliamentary institution. And in this case the new information technologies may be the bridge between the citizen and the political representatives elected by him.

Another fundamental body - a pillar in the development of the technical and parliamentary cooperation and in the modernisation of the parliamentary institutions - is the Association of Secretaries-General of Portuguese-speaking Parliaments (ASG-PLP). At present its President is the Director-General of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.

The ASG-PLP meets once a year in the country holding the presidency. Its activity is based on programmes duly approved by its members and it draws up activity reports on its annual performance.

Proving once more that the use of the information and communication technologies easier enables parliaments to come closer to citizens, the ASG-PLP has created its own homepage on the Internet, www.asg-plp.org, which is assumed as a dynamic and appealing instrument.

Bearing in mind the goal to modernise the parliamentary institution, the ASG-PLP has established inter-parliamentary training as one of the main aspects of its activity programme.

This training aims at promoting the quality of the performance of the parliamentary staff that give support to the political activity and develop logistical and administrative activities in the parliaments.

Inter-parliamentary training allows the ASG-PLP to fulfil one of its objectives: to promote the exchange of experiences between the member parliaments. The great advantage of multilateral training is the possibility to gather simultaneously parliamentary officials from different origins and experiences, but having in common a linguistic heritage and very strong cultural affinities.

The Assembly of the Republic of Portugal organised in 2004 the first inter-parliamentary training on the theme *The Parliament and the challenges of the contemporary society*. At this moment the second training is taking place in Lisbon under the theme *Inter-disciplinarity of the parliamentary staff*.

Finally, the ASG-PLP's structure and functioning is very similar to that of the Association of Secretaries-General of IPU Parliaments, which has inspired the conception of the ASG-PLP.



Mr Yogendra Narain (India) said that in a globalised world which tended to remove frontiers between countries, Parliaments were confronted with new challenges. The economic questions which were within the responsibility of international organisations or institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World

Trade Organisation etc had gained a power of influence without precedent over, the political choices and laws of many States, including over subjects which were purely of national interest. This had also affected politics. In these circumstances, there was strong feeling that regional Parliament, should give greater importance to co-operative changes without hindrance, allowing efficient and systematic treatment of up-to-date subjects.

Apart from the growing integration of national economies, other subjects had gained a transnational character. Questions relating to the environment and natural disasters showed, for example, that wide-ranging catastrophes affecting many States could be better dealt with in the future if the responses and communications between countries worked faster and if early systems of warning were in place. All of this amounted to an appeal for greater involvement on the part of National Governments in international matters. In these circumstances, cooperation between National Parliaments within a particular geographical region could make a significant difference if they demanded accountability from their respective Governments.

At the same time, although States pursued their particular interests within regional organisations, supranational Parliament, breathed a new life into cross-border cooperation. In addition, it was necessary to improve regional economic perspectives and support the means available to Governments to deal with problems which were common to a particular region.

Redevelopment of multilateral cooperation had introduced new dimension is to international relations. Concomitantly, there was a greater awareness that solutions proposed I way of treating your international Convention in a large number of areas such as sharing water resources, biodiversity, terrorism etc affected in the same way all the people of all particular region. It is probable that in the future the tendency will be to find a regional view on all of these subjects. Questions of common interest such as terrorism, drug trafficking, fitting in people or pollution would be better dealt with by way of regional cooperation. In this context it is possible that regional Parliaments would put into place appropriate institutional structures to deal with such questions more rapidly. Regional Parliament, also were able to give Parliamentary and public support to intergovernmental decisions. This could in all likelihood lead to regional integration which would contribute to regional peace and security. Furthermore, nations which grouped together to defend their regional interests within an international pantly would be more influential than if they acted separately. Regional integration would probably lead to regional peace, creating new possibilities for improved international co-operation to bring to an end ignorance, poverty and disease.

Having regard to the number of questions to deal with, international cooperation in the 21st-century will require other working practices and the participation of new actors. The participation of Parliaments and parliamentarians was necessary in order to honour engagements undertaken in international and regional forums which had become more important than ever before. Many questions examined by Parliaments on a national basis had an international dimension. It is an acknowledged fact that changes in the law and politics of many countries were the result of multilateral agreements which bound national Governments and which meant that Parliaments had to examine and agree to laws which were in accordance with the goals and objectives of these mul-

tilateral agreements. Taking this into account, regional Parliaments could play the role of mediator and could contribute to the full development and growth of the region.

Nonetheless, sometimes one hears voices raised explaining that international Parliaments can only work where there is an agreement on the objectives between the member States—such as common political policies, a common currency etc. Regional groupings also entail a consensus on questions such as that of language, religion, ethnic differences, before it is possible to hope for any tangible progress. The working methods of new supranational Parliaments had to be based on democratic principles. If they were democratically elected that would allow correction of the democratic deficit which prevails at the moment in the international arena.

Because globalisation was dissolving many national frontiers some people were treating supranational or regional Parliaments as the next logical step towards a unified world government. Whatever the basic international trends appeared to be, it was important that the process of integration should encourage mankind to make closer contacts with people in other geographical regions. In this context, in India had been an active partner in international co-operation in the economic sphere at a regional level under the auspices of organisations or initiatives such as the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) or the Commonwealth and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

In Southeast Asia, in application of successive decision is of summits of SAARC underlining the importance of reinforcement of direct cooperation between the peoples of member countries, the Presidents of Parliaments countries of the SAARC zone (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) had decided at their meeting in Kathmandu in 1992 to establish the Association of Speakers and Parliamentarians of countries of the SAARC region.

The Charter of the Association, among other things, sets out the aims of: promoting, coordinating and exchanging experience between member Parliaments; completing and improving work of the SAARC and of reinforcing knowledge of its principles and activities among Members of Parliament; of creating a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on practice and procedure of Parliament; and of cooperating in international forums on questions of common interest.

The first conference of the Association had been hosted by the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in July 1995, marking the start of greater inter-parliamentary co-operation in Southeast Asia.

Since that time, several conferences of the Association had taken place in the region – but much remained to be done in order to push forward regional Parliamentary co-operation in Southeast Asia.

India was the most populous State in the Commonwealth, representing alone almost 60% of the total population of the association. India was fourth largest contributor to the budget of the Commonwealth Secretariat, after the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. Some people thought that India, by reason of its population and size, constituted a region in itself. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had suggested that India should organise its annual conference in 2007, in the same way as India had done in 1957, 1975 and 1991.

In order to develop and maintain the healthy traditions and conventions of our Parliamentary institutions, India organised an annual conference of speakers of deliberative assemblies – this had started in 1921. This form had worked ceaselessly to reinforce the democratic process within the 28 States and 7 territories of the Union. At the moment, 69 conferences of Speakers had taken place which had dealt with questions of crucial importance for Parliamentary democracy, its functioning and rules of procedure. The conference for secretaries-general of deliberative assemblies took place at the same time.

Mr Petr Tkachenko (Russia) raised the idea of Parliamentary Corporation between the Federation Council and the Parliaments of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This allowed various questions relating to Human Rights to be dealt with.

It was possible to say without exaggeration that this cooperation had a special place in the international activities of the Federation Council. These international activities were in the first place linked to a series of economic and humanitarian factors and the cultural and historic heritage of the people who lived in the territories of the Commonwealth.

The idea of Parliamentary Corporation within the Commonwealth was carried out as much on a bilateral basis as on a multilateral basis. Bilateral relations with Parliaments of these countries were based on agreements. Parallel agreements with Parliaments with only one Chamber had been agreed on behalf of the Federal Assembly of the Federation of Russia (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldavia, Ukraine), while cooperation with bicameral Parliaments was responsibility of the Federation Council directly with the corresponding Chamber of the Parliament of the State within the Commonwealth (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan).

Current moment, five agreements and three protocols had been signed with each of the States of the Commonwealth – with the exception of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. As a result of these agreements and in order to organise coordination of the different parties, into Parliamentary bilateral commissions had been established which examined at their meetings (which was no less than once term) key subjects relating to the development and reinforcement of bilateral cooperation in politics, economics, humanitarian questions etc. In parallel, particular attention was given to questions relating to harmonisation of national legislation, synchronisation of bilateral treaties and procedures of ratification and coordination within the international Parliamentary arena.

The member States of the Commonwealth lacked unity in their legal systems. This state of affairs justified the essential role which could – and should – be played by a multilateral interparliamentary organisation such as the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The work of improvement and harmonisation of legal instruments across borders had become more and more important.

Recent events called for new advances in reform of the Commonwealth and reinforcement of co-operation at all levels in order to deal with geopolitical changes in the region and the wider world.

For that reason it was thought that the attempt to create a common economic area (EEC) between the “big four” – Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine – was an important advance in this area. Members of Parliament of these States had their own

“niche” in this process because of the need for legislation to put into effect the agreement setting up the EEC. Important work was under way involving revision of the national legislation of the member States to make it conform with the Constitution of the EEC and its priorities. The process of formation of the EEC included the creation of a free exchange zone and plans for a common customs union.

One of the priorities for co-operation within the Commonwealth was the establishment of a Union of States with Belarus. This involved a continuing process based on application of a treaty and a programme of action which included steps towards integration. The Union State Constitutional Act was being prepared which would reflect the political structure of the association. Among its basic principles were the preservation of the integrity and sovereignty of the constituent member States.

In advance of the Parliament of the Union of States being established, the Parliamentary Assembly of Belarus and the Russian federation would continue.

Mr Anders Forsberg (Sweden) said that knowledge of the experience of foreign Parliaments was always profitable. He asked whether the Parliamentary Association of East Africa regularly reported to national Parliaments on its work and, if this was the case, in what way. He also wanted to know if the reports were debated within national Parliaments.

Mr Xavier Roques (France) raised the experience of the National Assembly in France. There, inter-parliamentary co-operation followed three main directions.

The first direction was represented by European countries which were outside the European Union. On this basis, the National Assembly, in association with the German Bundestag, ran a programme of support extending over several years for the Duma of the Federation of Russia. The National Assembly had also, alongside the Bundestag and the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium, worked to create an Assembly in Kosovo. A working link with the Chamber of Deputies of Romania was being operated within the framework of the PHARE programme of the European Union.

Within the framework of the United Nations, the National Assembly had taken part in the establishment of the Afghan Parliament. French Parliamentary officials had been regularly sent to Kabul and Afghan delegations had been welcomed in Paris.

The second direction was that of special relationship with the German Bundestag. Within this framework long exchanges of staff (lasting between 18 months in two years) had been organised since 2000, which had involved three French officials and three German officials.

The third direction was that of French-speaking countries, “*francophonie*”. There was a Parliamentary Assembly of French-speaking Nations, which constituted the Parliamentary wing of the International Organisation of French-speaking Nations, as well as an Association of Secretaries General of French-speaking Parliaments (ASGPF).

The ASGPF met once a year, usually in Paris, and its activities were very similar to those of the ASGP.

Mrs Doris Katai Katebe Mwinga (Zambia) said that the Parliamentary Forum of the SADC included parliamentarians from the following States: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Forum, which was

made up of representatives collected by their Parliaments, had examined the question of equality between men and women and its link with development.

In 2001, the Forum had accepted recommendations on the rules and procedures for election in the region and had sent of service to 10 countries to monitor 14 elections. The basic rules which had been prepared allowed the quality and transparency of these exercises to be judged.

The Forum took part in conflict resolution. This involved preparation of "Win Win" strategies.

The Forum was working on the question of AIDS, which was a priority for all the countries in the region. This work had to be carried forward in order for the requisite laws to be agreed in each of the countries.

The Forum also was interested in the management of Parliament, which was a question of no little importance relating to their efficiency and development. An information and guidance centre had been created which was aimed at training over 2000 Members and staff of parliaments within the SADC.

Mr Hafnaoui Amrani (Algeria) mentioned that Parliamentary co-operation could take place on the political level (contacts and direct talks between Members) or on the technical level (co-operation between offices and staff of Parliament).

On the technical level, the African network for cooperation between Parliamentary staff – the latest meeting of which had been held in Burkina Faso – had given excellent results allowing more recently established Parliaments to profit from the experience of older Parliaments. This was particularly the case relating to professional training where staff dealing with Bills who had duty of following the work of Committees did not always have sufficient professional knowledge.

Mr George Petricu (Romania) thought that the African experience, was rich information for the Parliaments of other geopolitical areas.

In the course of the last few years, the Romanian Parliament had undertaken many activities with African Parliaments both within an international framework as well as bilaterally. The Romanian Parliament was also extremely active within the Parliamentary Assembly of French-speaking Nations and the ASGPF.

Mr Boubeker Assoul (Algeria) referred to the long-term collaboration with the National Assembly in France, with which a seminar would soon be organised In Algiers (November 2005) on support for the role of national parliaments.

With the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) a joint operation had been established to encourage research into the area of legislation.

Within the framework of the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA) the Maghreb consultative Council supported harmonisation of financial legislation and customs duties etc and also encouraged the exchange of experience.

Mr El Hadj Umar Sani (Nigeria) emphasise the importance of the question of cooperation for many African parliaments. The many African regional organisations often had praiseworthy objectives – promotion of human rights and democracy, reinforcement of regional solidarity – but they were often faced with serious difficulties relating to resources. They often needed help to attain their objectives, which should be the

main direction for well inter-parliamentary co-operation. The question remained what form such help to regional organisations should take.

Mr Samuel Waweru Ndindiri (Kenya) thought that the debate had been full of interest and underlined the importance of Pan African co-operation.

The debate had demonstrated the ability of various Parliament to share their experience. This was notably the case with the Kenyan Parliament and Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia. Exchanges of experience at the highest level were taking place with Somalia, where a new Parliament was being created, and these experiences would allow important lessons for the future to be learned.