





A Working Group comprising representatives from the French National Assembly, the European Parliament, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and IPU led the effort to identify the Common Principles and develop the commentary on them. The group's members were François Duluc, Dirk Toornstra, Scott Hubli, Charles Chauvel, Norah Babic and Andy Richardson.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) will continue to be the recipient of endorsements and focal point for future revisions of the Common Principles. The Common Principles can be endorsed by a letter of notification addressed to the IPU Secretariat (postbox@ipu.org).

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Foreword

It has been over four decades since support to parliaments in its present form was initiated. Prior to that, there has been a long history of parliaments assisting each other by sharing experiences and challenges.

In recent times, parliaments around the world have increasingly sought advice about how to modernize their institution, maintain close contact with citizens and effectively fulfil their constitutional functions of law-making, oversight and representation. The number of parliaments has also increased, and the solidarity displayed by parliaments as they continually seek to share their experiences with one another is to be emulated.

Parliaments are without a doubt essential to a vibrant democracy, maintaining peace, upholding the rule of law and human rights, promoting gender equality, advocating for inclusive politics, increasing economic prosperity and promoting social justice. Accordingly, parliaments must be well structured, resourced and empowered to effectively fulfil their mandate. Today more than ever parliaments are working harder to develop their capacity to better

respond to the increased scrutiny and growing expectations from people for more efficient and effective service from their representatives.

The international community has also come to understand the importance of parliaments to peace and sustainable development, and to recognize the need to invest in parliamentary development. The substantial growth in support available to parliaments from the international community in recent years is testament to the latter's enhanced understanding of parliament's importance. However, the increase in support raises a number of questions related to coordination, cooperation, coherence and quality, meeting the challenge of harmonizing support, as well as instilling common values in the support provided.

The Common Principles summarize the most important and aspirational elements of parliamentary development and aim to guide support initiatives by examining all the factors that need to be considered in designing and managing effective parliamentary support.

The Common Principles affirm that support programmes must take account of the variety of

cultural, religious, political and institutional contexts, and seek to balance competing tensions that are a regular part of the work of parliaments, given their complex and highly political nature.

Indeed, the complexity and political nature of parliaments pose many challenges to providing support. Overcoming these challenges is only possible from within parliament.

The first and core tenet, therefore, is that only parliament can take responsibility for its own development. External partners must recognize that parliament is a quintessentially political environment, where needs can evolve and opportunities arise without warning. At the same time, parliaments should take an inclusive approach to their development by involving members of every political persuasion, as well as parliamentary staff and other relevant stakeholders. These are the foundations that should underpin successful parliamentary development.

All members of the parliamentary community are called on to give life to these Common Principles by incorporating them into their work. By raising the quality

of support to parliaments, we can help to strengthen parliaments and raise the quality of democracy itself.

The Common Principles are an invitation to all, parliaments and partners alike, to work together to improve the quality of support to parliaments. The IPU was pleased to convene the working group that led this effort.

We hope they will inspire a better quality of parliamentary support throughout the parliamentary community, gain momentum in the years to come and continue to make an important contribution to the field of parliamentary development.

Martin Chungong
Secretary General



Introduction

Common principles for support to parliaments

The Common Principles developed to support to parliaments comprise one overarching General Principle and nine specific Principles and are designed to achieve two main objectives:

- Assist partners engaged in the front line of parliamentary support and parliaments worldwide to work together with enhanced relevance, sensitivity and effectiveness.
- Enable partners and parliaments to work towards sharing a fundamental approach to the design and implementation of parliamentary support.

Support available to parliaments has grown significantly in recent years. As a result, there is now extensive experience in this field shared between a range of organizations and individuals partnering with parliaments. This has made the present distillation

of Common Principles possible. The aim has been to capture the fundamentals of parliamentary support for the benefit of all parliaments and their partners¹ in a single, accessible document.

The Principles are intended to provide an inclusive and enabling framework for partners that:

- Reflects an effective, practical approach to support for parliaments.
- Takes full account of the uniqueness of each parliamentary institution, while recognizing emerging international standards for all democratic parliaments.
- Emphasizes inclusive parliamentary ownership of its development and change process.
- Advances a culture of partnership, trust and mutual respect.

¹ The largely interchangeable terms “partners”, “parliamentary support partners” and “parliamentary partners” are used throughout the document to refer to those actors that are external to parliaments and who are engaged in parliamentary support work. “Partnership” refers to the relationship between partners and parliaments. “Support to parliaments” and “parliamentary support” are used interchangeably throughout the document.

In particular, the Principles are designed to promote effective communication and cooperation at the local, regional and global levels, and to assist in ensuring that partners' roles and responsibilities in providing parliamentary support are transparent, mutually agreed and complementary.

The present Principles will undoubtedly undergo changes and refinements over time. This process will take account of partners' and parliaments' experience and development, thereby ensuring their continuing relevance to effective parliamentary support.

Adoption of these Principles by parliaments and partners as a common framework for parliamentary support should ensure, therefore, that support activities are made progressively more effective and efficient. This, in turn, will enhance the capacity of parliaments to fulfil their core functions.

Parliamentary support – rationale and nature

Rationale

Well-structured and resourced parliaments are essential to a vibrant democracy, maintaining peace, upholding the rule of law and human rights, advancing gender equality and youth participation, increasing economic prosperity and promoting social justice. Parliaments' growing legislative, oversight and representative responsibilities in these areas imply that all citizens have a vital stake in the institution.

There is a strong desire by many parliaments to develop their capacities in response to the growing expectations of people for more efficient and effective service delivery from their representatives, which needs to be

appropriate and robust external technical support from an international community with a common interest and stake in the functioning of all key democratic institutions. This common purpose provides the rationale for parliamentary support.

Nature

Parliaments are complex organizations with distinct political, procedural and administrative aspects. This complexity presents significant challenges when devising effective external support.

Parliaments comprise elected politicians, assisted by a range of officials and staff providing procedural

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