

# Follow-up to the International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments

By Lisa von Trapp

The International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments (organized by the World Bank Institute, UNDP, and six partners in Paris on March 2-4, 2010) gathered over 100 MPs, parliamentary development practitioners, and donors to take stock of and assess progress on reaching consensus on internationally agreed standards and assessment frameworks for democratic parliaments. The conference provided a forum to discuss the different approaches for evaluation of parliament, and to share lessons learned around the potential results and impact of such evaluations.

Since the conference, participating organizations have continued to take this work forward in different ways. The following, while not exhaustive, highlights some of the recent initiatives.

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Dr. Karl T. Kurtz, Director of the Trust for Representative



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Democracy at the **US National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)** posted two pieces of analysis entitled "*Do American Legislatures Meet International Standards for Democratic Legislatures?*" and "*What can American Legislative Practice Contribute to International Standards for Democratic Legislatures?*" NCSL has hosted a panel on standards entitled "*How Good is Your Legislature*" during their Legislative Summit in Louisville, Kentucky on July 25-28, 2010.

During the International Conference, the floor deliberated on and adopted a conference Participants' Statement (available in English and French) recognizing "emerging consensus on the core values of a democratic parliament", an institution "that is representative of the political will and social diversity of the population, and is effective in its legislative, oversight and representation functions, at the sub-national, national and international levels." They noted that "current assessment frameworks have the potential to be immensely powerful tools for change" and that "the effectiveness of such assessments should be judged against the outcomes that emerge, not only in terms of parliament becoming more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, but also in terms of improved economic and social development."

The Statement identifies areas of consensus between the various tools, in areas such as procedural fairness, democratic legitimacy and representation, parliamentary organization, and core legislative and oversight functions, as well as areas that remain challenging, such as political financing, parliamentary values and ethical issues, criteria around specific innovations or "emerging" practices, and criteria that are highly dependent on the size of jurisdictions or the availability of resources. It concludes with a set of recommendations for parliaments, parliamentary strengthening organizations, inter-parliamentary organizations, donors, and other actors.



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**SADC Parliamentary Forum's** Committee on Democracy and Governance met during SADC PF's 27th Plenary Assembly Meeting in Livingstone, Zambia on May 27 - June 5, 2010 to discuss their draft benchmarks and outline plans for a benchmarks workshop for their non-Anglophone members tentatively scheduled to take place in Angola in September 2010.

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**The Confederation of Parliaments of the Americas' (COPA)** Committee on Democracy and Peace has drafted a first set of benchmarks using the CPA and APF benchmarks as a starting point while incorporating feedback from its Latin American and other members. The draft document (soon to be translated into English and Spanish) is entitled "*La contribution parlementaire à la démocratie: ébauche de critères pour les parlements des Amériques*" and was discussed during a session at their special General Assembly in Querétaro, Mexico on July 20-25, 2010.

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Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC), Rapporteur for the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE)** Committee on Rules of Procedures, Immunities and Institutional Affairs prepared a questionnaire concerning practical examples of strengths of parliaments and (possibly) weaknesses to be avoided which was sent to member parliaments. To date the Committee has received responses from the parliaments of Sweden, Azerbaijan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, and Germany. A preliminary report entitled "*Self-evaluation by Europe's national parliaments: procedural guidelines*" has

been prepared and was discussed for the first time by the Committee on June 23, 2010.

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**The European Parliament Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD)** is organized a workshop on the 23<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September, with a select group of interested EU and ACP parliaments, practitioners, and donors, to discuss benchmarks and essential ingredients for needs assessments within the broader context of facilitating capacity support for new and emerging parliamentary democracies.

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**WBI** is planning a book on the benchmarks and self-assessment process to be published in the second quarter of 2011. The book will be organized along the lines of the conference agenda and include a series of case studies. The book will also provide an opportunity to expand on certain points such as the areas of consensus identified in the conference and newer work on parliamentary monitoring organizations. WBI will also be partnering with the IPSA's Research Committee of Legislative Specialists to host a session on Benchmarks and Self Assessment for Democratic Parliaments during the Southern Political Science Associations' (SPSA) Annual Meeting in New Orleans on January 6-8, 2011.

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