

ARAB PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN

Quarterly newsletter published by UNDP's Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) with the contribution of Arab parliaments and parliamentarians.

ISSUE 1
MARCH 2009

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2** Arab Parliaments' News
- 3** Arab Legislation
- 4** In the Spotlight: The Lebanese Electoral Law: An Emergency Exit to Recurring Political Crises!
- 6** In Focus: Women in Arab Parliaments
- 8** Parliamentary Contributions: Improving Rules of Procedure in Arab Legislative Councils. By Mr. Rachid Medouar, former member of the House of Representatives, Morocco.
- 12** Parliaments of the World: Rwanda, First Parliament with a Majority of Women

EDITORIAL

The parliament is at the core of the State's quest to lay the genuine foundations of democracy. It represents the people's will,

aspirations and interests, and is responsible for enacting laws and general policies, in addition to monitoring the executive authority. During the last few years, parliamentary development has gained increasing importance, with states taking concrete measures to consolidate their parliaments and strengthen the capacities of parliamentarians in performing their representative, legislative and oversight functions.

Launched in 2004 in response to the growing demand of parliamentary development in our Arab region, the Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) seeks to contribute to the development of Arab Parliaments through a series of *activities* and *working groups* on key issues in the region. With the participation of a large number of parliamentarians, both men and women, and Arab and international experts, these activities provide a platform for dialogue and sharing experience. They also aim at strengthening the legislative and oversight capacities of Arab parliamentarians and identifying good practices and main challenges facing Arab legislatures.

Its mission being the promotion of more representative parliaments, this initiative is also dedicated to strengthening the capacities of women parliamentarians in Arab countries by encouraging their participation in regional activities, while facilitating experience and practice sharing, and developing knowledge on the participation of Arab women in politics.

Given the scarcity of parliamentary development knowledge in Arabic, the initiative focuses on commissioning and publishing *documents and studies* in Arabic on various aspects of parliamentary development. A parliamentary development knowledge portal was launched in 2006, both in Arabic and English, www.arabparliaments.org. It provides access to studies, policy papers, translated resources and links to networks and databases, and aims, through a wide selection of tools, at supporting parliamentary work in the Arab countries.

Today, we are launching the Arab Parliamentary Bulletin, driven by the same spirit that has motivated the initiative to deploy all efforts possible to strengthen the capacities of Arab parliaments and promote their role. The Bulletin tries to bring the latest in Arab and international parliamentary news, with articles, analyses, and interviews with Arab and foreign parliamentarians and experts, along with the coverage of the Initiative's latest activities and publications. Through this quarterly publication, which is the first of its kind on parliamentary development in the Arab region, we seek to communicate with Arab parliaments and their members, and modestly contribute to spreading parliamentary knowledge across the region.

We truly hope that we can work together towards enhancing parliamentary performance in the Arab region and building stronger parliamentary institutions, key players in the promotion of democracy.

**WE INVITE YOU TO VISIT
OUR WEBSITE:
www.arabparliaments.org**

Arab Parliaments' News

2

Algeria: The National People's Assembly organized 11 training sessions, workshops, seminars and fora on different topics such as: "Techniques to Draft and Amend Laws" and "Budget Analysis – Good Practices and Means". These two activities were organized with the support of UNDP.

Bahrain: In 2008 the Shura Council organized nine collective training programs and five training seminars, addressed to a number of secretaries and administrative public servants, namely the [Workshop on Measuring the Impact of Legislation](#), aiming at strengthening their capacity to analyze the social, economic, political and environmental impact of legislation and policies through exposure to mechanisms and technical tools used in law assessment.

Oman: The Shura Council, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), organized the [Third Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and Women in Political Decision-making Positions of the GCC States: Partnership between women parliamentarians, the media and women's associations](#), in Masqat, on 21 – 22 December 2008. This meeting aimed at strengthening cooperation and experience sharing amongst women in the region, and discussing topics on women's role in politics. The conference also conveyed a political message highlighting the importance of women's participation in political life in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Iraq: The Members' Affairs and Parliamentary Development Committee of the Council of Representatives of Iraq (CoR) organized a number of training sessions for parliamentarians and administrative civil servants namely: training session on legislative monitoring, training session on

leadership, training session on the work of parliamentary committees, training on constitutional, legal and legislative terminology in English, and training on legislative monitoring of the executive. Furthermore, the CoR, in cooperation with the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) and UNDP-Iraq, also organized training workshops on legislative drafting, and on the role of the committee Secretaries. Two Workshops on the Preparation and the Adoption of the 2007 and 2008 National Budgets were organized in an effort to strengthen the CoR's oversight capacities. The Iraqi parliament also sought UNDP's support in drafting a Code of Conduct for its members.

Lebanon: In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Lebanese National Assembly organized several activities, including training sessions for secretaries of parliamentary committees on legislative drafting, and a seminar on human rights on the occasion of the "International Human Rights Day". The Lebanese Assembly also organized a forum on the [Role of Political Parties to Support National Dialogue and Institutions \(Experience of Northern Ireland\)](#) in cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in October 2008, with the participation of Lebanese parliamentarians, political parties and civil society representatives. On the occasion of World Water Day on 26 March 2008, the Parliament organized a forum entitled "Lebanon's Water: Good Governance and Regional Conflicts" with the participation of the relevant committees, administrative representatives, civil society and a number of experts and stakeholders.

Source: Websites of Arab parliaments or websites covering parliamentary activities during 2008.

Arab Legislation

3

Tunisia: On 24 July 2008, the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies adopted a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 20 to 18 years old, and to allow multiple candidates to run during the next presidential elections.

The Chamber of Deputies also adopted [law 37, dated 16 June 2008, on the Higher Council for Human Rights and Basic Liberties](#).

Sudan: The Sudanese National Assembly adopted the "2008 National Elections Act" on 7 July 2008, since the current mandate of the Assembly, appointed by a republican decree on 31 August 2005 to serve during the transitional period, will expire soon. According to the new act, 60% of MPs will be elected according to the majority system, and 15% according to proportional representation through separate and closed party lists. The law also reserved a 25%-quota for women (i.e. 112 reserved seats) to be elected according to proportional representation through separate and closed party lists. The organization of electoral funding, use of media throughout the campaign, corrupt and illegal practices and electoral violations with their relevant sanctions, are also regulated by this act. Furthermore, the law regulated the election of the president, the prime minister of Southern Sudan and state governors.

Iraq: The Council of Representatives (CoR) adopted the [Election Law on Governorate, District & Sub-district Councils](#) and [The Law to Amend Election Law on Governorate, District & Sub-district Councils no. 36 for 2008](#).

The draft law organizing the relationship between members of the Council and the government was transferred to the Members Affairs &

Parliamentary Development committee, and the [Legal Committee](#) of the CoR.

The draft law on the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs was transferred before the Women, Family and Children Committee in the Council.

Kuwait: 144 draft laws were submitted by members of the National Assembly during the last 6 months of 2008 on a number of issues: Draft Law on Fighting Corruption, Draft Law on Founding Political Parties, and Draft Law on the Right to Information. Several draft laws on Revealing Financial Assets, Amending the Assembly Bylaws, Amending the Electoral Law and Nationality Law, Amending the Law Organizing the Judiciary, and Laws on establishing various administrative bodies were also submitted.

Lebanon: The Lebanese National Assembly adopted, on 16 October 2008, law no. 32 on Expanding the Jurisdiction of the [Special Investigation Commission-Fighting Money Laundering \(SIC\)](#) to include an exclusive authority to freeze assets and lift secrecy on bank accounts, in compliance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) ratified by Lebanon on the 7th of October 2008.

Yemen: A draft law on the right to information was submitted to the parliament and the Culture and Media Committee is currently reviewing and finalizing it.

Source: Information collected from website of parliaments, or information from PDIAR's communication with these parliaments, and thus does not include all adopted legislations and draft laws in Arab parliaments.

In The Spotlight

THE LEBANESE ELECTORAL LAW:

4 AN EMERGENCY EXIT TO RECURRING POLITICAL CRISES

The Lebanese electoral law, which will govern the 2009 parliamentary elections, raised much controversy last year among the parliamentary blocs. It was only after the worsening situation which led different parties to the brink of war that they met and concluded a meeting in Doha on a number of issues, including the electoral law. What is this legislation about? And what are its potential implications?



During the past years, the electoral law was the subject of continuous bickering among the different factions. Prior to the famous Taef agreement, the 1960 "Caza"-based electoral law (based on small constituencies) regulated the parliamentary elections up until the 1972 elections. The parliament's mandate was then extended until 1992 due to the outbreak of the civil war. Following the Taef agreement, the "Mohafaza" was adopted as an electoral district (a district larger than a "Caza" where one "Mohafaza" includes several "Cazas"). In 2000, a new electoral law was adopted with smaller electoral districts (14 districts) and was also applied in the subsequent 2005 elections. It is worth noting that the electoral divisions between 1992 and 2005 lacked any unified criteria, and exceptions were the rule. In 2008, Lebanese members of parliament agreed in Doha to re-institute the 1960 electoral law with a few amendments regarding some "Cazas", given the demographic changes. According to the new law, there are 26 electoral districts and the elections will be held in only one day, while in the

past they were held on four consecutive weekends, the results of one round affecting those that followed.

Remarkable progress

The new electoral law number 25, dated 8 October 2008, adopted many amendments for the first time in Lebanon's electoral history. A number of these amendments were already proposed in the draft electoral law submitted by the National Commission on Electoral Law formed by the Lebanese government, namely:

- Forming the Electoral Campaign Supervisory Committee, to be composed of three retired judges, two former bar association presidents, two media and communication experts and three electoral experts (article 12). The adopted law stipulates that this Committee be linked to the Ministry of Interior. It also limits its scope of action to monitoring the electoral media, advertisement, spending and ensuring that laws are respected (article 19), while the draft law submitted by the National Commission granted the Supervisory Committee full independence and a wide mandate to handle, supervise and monitor all electoral affairs.
- Granting competent civil society organizations the right to monitor the electoral process, if they meet the required conditions (article 20).
- Regulating electoral funding and spending: The law determines a ceiling for electoral spending (article 57) and organizes spending monitoring mechanisms. The candidates are bound to open an account in any bank operating in Lebanon called the "Account of the electoral campaign", which is not protected by secrecy, to receive all contributions and through which all electoral expenses during the electoral campaign are paid (article 55).

The electoral law provided an emergency exit to the political crisis in Lebanon, and introduced remarkable reforms to promote the integrity and transparency of the electoral process, even if not all hopes of voters were met.

- Regulating electoral media and advertising: The law imposes some basic rules for election coverage by public and private media wishing to broadcast electoral advertisement, while the 2000 law banned electoral advertisement during the campaign (article 68 of law number 171, dated 6 January 2000).
- Enabling citizens to vote using their identity cards or passports (article 88) instead of the electoral card that was required by the previous law.
- Granting every Lebanese residing outside the Lebanese territory the right to vote in Lebanese embassies and consulates. This article however will only come into effect during the next 2013 elections.

Drawbacks

Most Lebanese feuding parties agreed on the final version of the Lebanese electoral law, at the expense of a number of reforms many Lebanese were hoping for and demanding through civil society organizations. Long awaited but ignored by the new law is the proportional representation, though the draft law submitted by the National Commission had suggested a mixed system through which 77 members of parliament would be elected according to majority vote (in small districts) and 51 members according to proportional representation (in large districts). Many experts consider that this mixed system takes into consideration the complex demographic reality in Lebanon, but at the same time contributes to developing political parties, through encouraging them to form alliances and blocs based on political programs that address all Lebanese citizens rather than narrow constituencies included in small electoral districts. It also limits political "individualism" allowing parties to have competent representatives in parliament rather than powerful members only.

Apart from proportionality, the new law dropped the proposal for women quota, despite the constant demands of civil society organizations during the past few years, and the weak representation of women in the Lebanese parliament (4.7% only). Lebanon comes in the 15th place among Arab states in terms of the percentage of women parliamentarians, while countries adopting the quota system scored significantly higher percentages, such as Iraq (25.5%) and Mauritania (22.1%).

Furthermore, a heated debate also broke out as a result of ignoring the National Commission's suggestion to use official pre-printed ballots, only available in polling stations, clearly indicating the first name, father's name and last name of candidates and their pictures, a measure considered vital in limiting fake ballots on elections day, hence limiting the possibility of wasting votes.

In conclusion, the electoral law provided an emergency exit to the political crisis in Lebanon, and introduced remarkable reforms to promote the integrity and transparency of the electoral process, even if not all hopes of voters were met. The Parliamentarians will continue to shoulder the responsibility of working for change, and cooperating with the civil society to lobby for the realization of the much needed reforms that would guarantee true representation of all Lebanese citizens regardless of their sex, sect, and political belief.

Note: In its session held on 19 March 2009, the parliament amended Article 21 of the constitution. The new amendment decreased the voting age from 21 to 18 years. However this amendment still awaits the approval of the government in a maximum period of four months.

In Focus

WOMEN IN ARAB PARLIAMENTS

6 PROGRESS, STAGNATION OR REGRESSION?

Weak political participation of Arab women in general, and their ability to get elected to parliament and policy making positions in particular, constitute one of the major obstacles that face establishing inclusive democracies in Arab countries.

Figures and Indicators

Among all regions of the globe, the Arab region continues to register the lowest percentage of female representation in parliament, as women in lower or single houses stand for only 9.7% of the membership compared to the world average that reached 18.3% in 2008. Yet, a more detailed analysis of the figures shows that the progress made since 1998 is more significant than in other parts of the world, the number of Arab women MPs having almost tripled in less than 10 years (Figure 1).

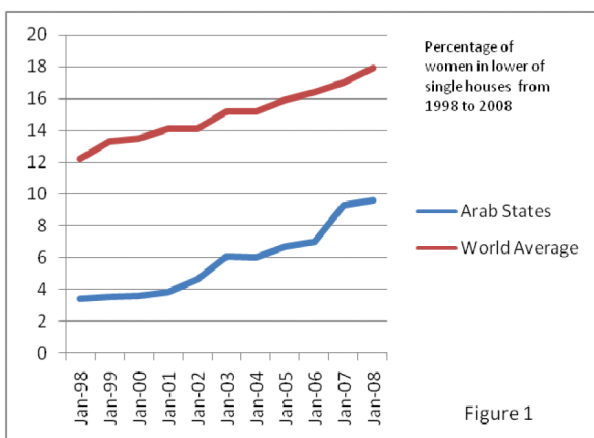


Figure 1

The higher figures in some parliaments, which somehow blur the real picture, can be attributed to the introduction of some democratic values and practices in a number of countries across the region,

including granting women the right to vote and run for office, the reform of electoral rules and systems, the regulation of political party life, etc. It is also and perhaps mostly due to special measures taken by several countries in an effort to encourage women's participation in elections and guarantee for them access to parliament. This is notably the case in Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia. However this rapid increase is marked by severe contrasts varying from 25.5% (Iraq) and 22.8% (Tunisia) to 0-2% (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Egypt and Bahrain).

Beyond analyzing the overall percentage, which is evidently increasing, it is essential to ask whether this rise in the number of women parliamentarians is a true indicator of the advancement of Arab women. It is also important to try to understand why in some countries with a relatively older democratic history, such as Egypt and Morocco, the numbers are regressing (Egypt, from 2.5% in 2000 to 2% in 2005¹; Morocco, from 10.8% in 2002 to 10.5% in 2007). In other countries such as Algeria, Jordan and to some extent Lebanon, the situation is evidently stagnating, while countries that have adopted a quota system registered a noticeable increase in the number of women MPs (Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Mauritania).

The encouraging election results in Iraq and Mauritania may translate an acceptance of the fact that democracy means adequate representation of women in parliament. At the practical level, it materialized in the need to implement some pro-women policy choices to facilitate women's access to elected office. However, in these two countries, but also in some others where similar positive measures have been implemented, the question that rises is: to what extent do affirmative

action measures ("women-friendly" electoral systems --List PR, reserved seats, statutory quotas, etc.) create a favorable environment for women to play a stronger role and participate actively and effectively in policy-making?

Empowering Arab Women Members of Parliament

Another question which emerges is to what extent is this progress sustainable and the competences consolidated so that women MPs can benefit both their constituencies and the younger generation of potential candidates? A review of MPs turnover in several Arab countries has showed that out of the overall percentage of members (men and women) who are re-elected to office, the percentage of women is much lower. This means that not only do women have fewer opportunities to access parliament, but also fewer chances to get re-elected and strengthen their capacities and improve their know how. In parliament, Arab women rarely occupy any leadership positions. With only few exceptions (Algeria, Lebanon, and Mauritania, where women hold the positions of Vice-Speaker, Committee Chair, or Head of political group), they are generally marginalized both in committees and political groups.

Facing the Challenges and the Way Ahead

Based on this brief overview of the situation of women in Arab parliaments, the need for the advancement of Arab women becomes evident through taking concrete measures such as reforming legislative frameworks (electoral laws, political party laws, etc.), reinforcing political will, and working towards changing the mentalities, to overcome the cultural and economic barriers. Engaging political parties, civil society, and media is crucial to provoke change and help elect truly representative institutions.

1. *These percentages include the women MPs appointed as part of the 10 seats reserved for the President. In 2000, 7 were elected and 4 appointed. In 2005, 4 were elected and 5 were appointed. If only the elected women are counted, the current percentage of women in the Egyptian National Assembly is less than 1%.*



Women in Arab Parliaments: Progress, Stagnation or Regression?

Beirut, 9-10 July 2008

In line with its mission to develop knowledge on women political participation in the Arab region, the Initiative organized this regional seminar, which aimed at identifying the barriers that hinder women's adequate representation in elections and parliament, and understanding the complex internal dynamics which characterize the situation of Arab women in politics, both in their race to get elected, and in their progress within the parliamentary institution. The Seminar brought together representatives from 11 Arab Parliaments (single or lower houses), women candidates in recent elections, representatives of political parties and civil society organizations, and a number of Arab and international experts. It presented an opportunity to identify the issues and explore ways to address them while taking into account recently introduced measures (reform of electoral system or rules, reserved seats, statutory quotas, etc.) and which have been tested for the first time in most countries.

Parliamentary Contributions

8

IMPROVING RULES OF PROCEDURE IN ARAB LEGISLATIVE COUNCILS

By Mr. Rachid Medouar
Former member of the Moroccan House of Representatives, and expert in parliamentary development

Rules of procedure are an essential tool to organize the work of the parliament and guarantee its smooth functioning. They govern and codify the relations between political actors (the government and its majority on one hand and the opposition on the other) to achieve the necessary stability and balance. They guarantee the rights of the minority and prevent the tyranny of the majority. They determine duties, shed light on violations and establish appropriate sanctions. They are the ultimate reference for conflict and dispute settlement. In a nutshell, rules of procedure are “the self-imposed law by which the parliament implicitly vows to abide”¹.

Rules of procedure are defined as the set of parliament-specific measures and decisions i.e. internal measures and decisions pertaining to the functioning of the parliament and its internal system². These are in general “rules with limited internal competence. They are legally binding to the members, the employees or the persons present in the premises of these parliaments”³.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that,

though these rules of procedures have limited scope in organizing and managing legislative councils, they have a highly important role in promoting democracy.

Parliamentary rules of procedure are as important as the institution itself. As a cornerstone of democracy, parliaments will only be able to perform efficiently, whether in their legislative role or in overseeing the performance, policy and bodies of the executive power, if their rules of procedure are organizing their work efficiently.

When preparing, drafting or amending rules of procedure governing our Arab legislative councils, a number of criteria should be met to ensure their efficiency – at least within the authorized scope. The more these criteria are respected, the more efficient the rules are efficient in organizing, facilitating and developing parliamentary work. This could only be verified through experience and practical implementation of rules and procedures. This article offers a first endeavor to put forward some of these criteria.

First criterion ***Sovereignty of parliament over its rules of procedure***

The first criterion – I believe – relates to the right to propose rules of procedure to the parliament and amend them. This implies the following important conditions:

- The parliament shall have full sovereignty and competence in setting its rules of procedure and the exclusive prerogative to suggest or amend them. This shall be in

Parliamentary rules of procedure are important as the institution itself. As a cornerstone of democracy, parliaments will only be able to perform efficiently, whether in their legislative role or in overseeing the performance, policy and bodies of the executive power, if their rules of procedure are organizing their work efficiently.

accordance with the principle of separation of powers, and would confirm the principle of the legislative power sovereignty and its independence from the executive power in managing its internal affairs. Since rules of procedure are strictly internal for parliaments, governments shall not be involved, whether through suggesting, lying out or reviewing rules of procedure, or taking part in any relevant discussion. However, the executive power shall have the right to appeal against the constitutionality of these rules before courts and specialized constitutional councils.

- The scope these rule of procedure govern must be clearly determined in texts such as the constitution and organizational laws. It should be stipulated that this scope shall not be violated, so that these constitutional texts define the limits between the scope of laws and the scope of parliamentary rules of procedure.
- When setting and amending its rules of procedure, the parliament shall abide by the legal procedures applied to other legal texts. These rules shall first be submitted as a draft to the office of the parliament, then referred to the specialized committee to be studied, and be subject to amendment by members of the council. These should then be discussed in a plenary session according to an agenda set by the parliament's bureau, to be approved and adopted by the majority of votes. They will only be published after having been signed by the Speaker of the parliament. This means that every member of the parliament is entitled to take the initiative to suggest or amend these rules. This freedom is determined by the constitution, and is not subject to any condition of number, quorum or time frame. The measures to amend these rules shall be stipulated in the rules themselves.

Our publications



Arab Parliamentarians Handbook for Empowering Youth

As Arab youth face increasing social, economic and political challenges, it becomes necessary for various stakeholders, whether governments, education institutions and civil society organizations, to deploy concerted efforts to address them. Parliamentarians play an essential role in empowering the youth, mainly through drafting legislation to protect them and promote their role in development. With the aim of strengthening capacities of Arab legislators to draft laws for the youth, the Initiative, in cooperation with the Arab Scout Parliamentary Union, and the Parliamentary Studies Programme at Cairo University, published the **Arab Parliamentarians Handbook for Empowering Youth**. This handbook provides Arab legislators with a draft youth law, and basic principles guiding youth policies, as well as an explanatory note on the draft law.

10 PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

- Parliamentary rules of procedure, as other legal texts, must be regular, stable, permanent, sustainable and continuous—without prejudice to the right mentioned above—, since their continuous amendment would disrupt members of parliament, who, once familiar with the rules, would be surprised by new regulations and procedures.
- In a bicameral parliamentary system – where two chambers form one parliament - both chambers of the parliament shall consult before laying rules of procedure. Even if every chamber has sovereignty over its own rules of procedure and is not bound by the rules of the other chamber, it shall not, however, lay down its own rules regardless of the rules of the other chamber. This will guarantee that reform measures and decisions, such as those affecting timeframe, are coherent, consistent, and promote complementarities and cooperation between the two chambers.
- Speakers of parliaments shall act with neutrality, objectivity and integrity while performing their duties.
- Adopting neutral approaches and measures based on equal chances and non-discrimination in relation to working hours and conditions, and providing linguistic facilities to all members of parliament to perform their missions.

Third criterion Transparency in administration and management

Numerous indicators reveal the transparent administration of legislative councils:

Second criterion Guaranteeing the rights of minorities

Three main indicators can serve as benchmarks for this criterion:

- Laying down mechanisms to guarantee the political rights of the opposition, independents, and ethnic and religious minorities to express their opinions and thoughts freely, free from any influence or pressure, and guarantee their proportional representation in internal management bodies of the parliament.
- Equal dissemination of information: Councils shall have an internal newsletter distributed to all members, in addition to a website to publish the agenda, the general program, the minutes of public sessions, the results of voting on legislative texts, and results of ongoing voting. It should also feature reports on members of parliament and their justified or unjustified absence during committee meetings and plenary sessions, and information on appointees and delegations sent abroad to represent the council, with mission reports made available electronically to those who wish to consult them.
- Form internal committees to oversee the parliament's budget and expenditures, with all political actors being proportionally represented.

Fourth criterion

Meticulous legislative drafting

The form of the law is of utmost importance as form and content are intertwined; a good law being good in content and form. Good legislative drafting of rules of procedure requires high technical and professional skills. Those in charge of the drafting must obey a number of essential regulations:

- **General organization:** First, the general structure of the text must be outlined, for it to have a strong and coherent structure. Therefore, it is required to organize sections, paragraphs and articles logically, taking into account real chronology and unity. It would also be helpful to lay out the main titles and sub-titles, and divide paragraphs into separate and clear units, then show rules with their corresponding numbers separately. Last but not least, a separate table of contents must be available for easy reference to the required rules.
- **Accuracy and clarity:** Those drafting the rules of procedure must carefully choose clear, accurate and specific terms, while avoiding obscure, ambiguous and vague expressions. Synonyms, repetitions, adjectives and redundancies ought to be avoided. Grammar and syntax rules must be obeyed and sentences (in Arabic) must include verbs used in the present, while the use of nominal sentences shall be limited⁴.

Finally, there is no doubt that drafting a comprehensive set of criteria needs concerted efforts from researchers and practitioners, in order to ensure efficient rules of procedure in our Arab legislative councils.

1. Edmond Rabbat, *The Medium in Constitutional Law*, p. 728, Dar Al Elm Lil Malayin, second print, 1971.

إدمون رباط، الوسيط في القانون الدستوري، ج ٢ | ص ٧٢٨، دار العلم للملايين، ط ٢ | ١٩٧١.

2. *Important Decisions of the Constitutional Council*, p 34, C.c.17, 18 and 24 June. *Les grandes décisions du conseil constitutionnel* p34. C.c.17-18 et 24 juin.

3. Pierre Avril / Jean Gicquel, *PARLIAMENTARY LAW*, P.8.2 Ed 1996. Pierre Avril/jean Gicquel. *DROIT PARLEMENTAIRE*. P.8.2 Ed 1996..

4. *Nominal sentences in Arabic include nouns as inchoative and predicate but no verb.*

www.arabparliaments.org

As a result of the Initiative's ongoing efforts to provide easy access to knowledge, Arabparliaments.org is constantly updated and has substantially expanded to become the leading parliamentary knowledge portal in the Arab region, providing easy access to a host of parliamentary development resources, such as studies, guidebooks, manuals, and databases. New on this website is the [Arab Political Parties Database](#), launched in both Arabic and English, to provide information on more than 100 political parties in four Arab countries, namely Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. Information provided on the political parties includes basic data such as the date of establishment, name of founder, goals, political agenda, publications and other media outlets, participation in parliamentary elections and number of seats won, electoral alliances, and representation in government. Special attention was given to the internal governance of the parties through providing the date of the last internal elections, as well as collecting the parties' internal regulations. The initiative's team is currently working on expanding it to include additional Arab countries. on expanding it to include additional Arab countries.

Parliament of the World

12

Rwanda: First parliament governed by a majority of women

At the last parliamentary elections in Rwanda in September 2008, 45 women were elected as members of a parliament of 80 members, i.e. 56.25%, making it the first parliament with a majority of women in the world. The Rwandan constitution stipulates for positive discrimination by allocating a minimum of 30% of seats to women in the parliament. The electoral law also stipulates that 53 members shall be elected through direct voting while 27 through indirect voting (24 seats reserved for women to be elected by electoral blocs in states, two seats to be elected by the youth national committee and one seat to be elected by the Union of the Associations for the Disabled).

Rwanda: Women account for 56.25% of the members of parliament

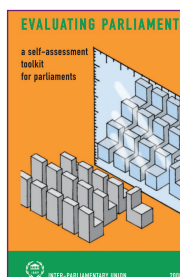
Civil society and political parties played an essential role in facilitating women's access to the parliament at such a high rate.

With indirect voters choosing 25 women as members of Parliament (24 through electoral blocs and one through the youth national committee), political parties also encouraged the nomination of women candidates on their lists in direct voting, in first positions in particular. The governing party granted access to 17 women (out of its 42 candidates who won the elections). 3 other women also managed to get elected in general elections (2 from the Social Democratic Party and one from the Liberal Party).



The Palestinian Legislative Council joins the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

During the 119th session of the General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union held between 13 and 15 October 2008, the Palestinian Legislative Council obtained full membership in the Union after the main law on the Union was amended, with Palestine being an observer in the Union since 1975.



Evaluating parliament: a new Inter-Parliamentary Union publication

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has recently published a booklet titled "Evaluating parliament: A self-assessment toolkit for parliaments". The booklet provides a set of practical tools parliaments can use to conduct a self-assessment of their democratic performance against a set of criteria set out in IPU's previous booklet "Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice." This would enable them to diagnose strengths and weaknesses, and determine priority areas in terms of parliamentary strengthening. The booklet covers parliamentary representation, parliamentary oversight over the executive, parliamentary legislative capacity, parliament transparency and accessibility, parliament accountability, and parliamentary involvement in international policy.

Our Activities



13

Working Group on Parliaments and the Reform of Political Party Legislation

In an effort to strengthen capacities of Arab parliamentarians and initiate specialized Arab parliamentary networks, the Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) launched in 2006 the [Working Group on Parliaments and the Reform of Political Party Legislation](#). The working group brought together more than 80 parliamentarians, experts, and representatives of political parties from eight Arab countries to review and assess existing and proposed Arab political party laws, their impact on the political scene, and the role of parliaments in proposing and amending party legislation.

During the last two years, the working group organized three regional workshops and one focus group meeting providing for its members a platform for serious and effective dialogue on a number of essential issues such as the impact of political party legislation on democratization in Arab countries, and its role in developing and institutionalizing political parties and organizing their funding. It also shed light on the role of political party legislation in promoting women's political participation in the Arab region. The initial phase "Knowledge and Consensus Building Phase" was characterized by the significant amount of research and comparative studies which served as bases for the regional meetings held. In addition to the knowledge products and the learning process which have come out of this collaborative process, one key outcome was reaching a consensus among the members of the working group on the importance and necessity for political party legislation to abide by a number of principles. The [General Principles for Political Parties Legislation in the Arab Region](#) are intended as guidelines to assess existing and draft laws and whether they guarantee political pluralism as well as

parties' long-term organizational development, inclusiveness, and competitiveness in elections and parliament.

Preparations are currently underway to launch the "Knowledge Dissemination and National Policy Dialogue" phase. This new phase, which should start in 2009, aims at spreading the accumulated knowledge across the Arab countries, and advancing the national dialogue on political party law through engaging the main stakeholders in an evaluation process, in light of the adopted general principles. Particular attention will be devoted to countries where new political party laws have recently been enacted.

The overall objective of these activities is to consolidate the expertise of the working group's members and support legal reform efforts that guarantee fair representation and participation across the Arab societies.

The Initiative

The Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) is a joint project launched by UNDP's Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS) and the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), with the support of the Belgian government to address the increasing demand for parliamentary assistance in the Arab Region. It builds on recent activities, findings, and lessons learned, and aims at promoting democratic governance through enhancing the role, capacity and image of the legislative institutions in the Arab countries and supporting the work of their members and administrations. You can contact us on: sara.salman@undp.org