

# Parliamentary Development to Prevent and Recover from Crisis

April 2011



## 1. The role of parliaments in crisis prevention and recovery

**Parliaments and political parties are key actors in crisis prevention and post-conflict recovery.** If they are representative and empowered, effective institutions of parliament can address the causes and dynamics of violence and instability through the representation of the diversity of the population, especially minority and/or marginalized populations; they can increase the political participation of women and use the windows of opportunity provided by post conflict contexts to promote a legal framework for gender equity and equality; they can also improve laws that generate better distribution of resources; etc. Parliaments offer a unique venue for structured dialogue on peacebuilding, including oversight of reconstruction, legislating human rights guarantees and addressing post-conflict security issues through parliament's everyday work of representing constituents through conflict-sensitive law-making, oversight of government action and the process of political contest.

In 2010 UNDP launched a programme on Parliaments and Crisis Prevention and Recovery to support efforts to enhance political governance in crisis affected countries; improve state-society relations for post-conflict state building and promote conflict-sensitive law making. The programme is sponsored by the Democratic Governance Group (DGG) and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR).

## 2. Achievements to-date

The Initiative has national, regional and global dimensions.

**National Level:** Currently operating in Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Iraq, Tunisia, El Salvador and Guatemala. Advisory services are also provided to Liberia and Nigeria.

**3 Sub-regional parliamentary working groups have been set up:** In the Arab States region, Central America and West Africa. Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, civil society organizations (CSOs) and donor's representatives have been actively engaged in such networks for the past year.

**AGORA ([www.agora-parl.org](http://www.agora-parl.org)) a global knowledge and communication platform:** This platform offers key documents, guidelines to improve parliamentary performance on crisis prevention and other development policies.

**Research and analysis:** New research on emerging CPR themes has been produced and shared with parliamentarians and practitioners in the regions to better inform parliaments on important CPR challenges such as electoral and political violence, gender-based violence, armed violence, regional crisis prevention mechanisms, the role of political parties and statebuilding.

**Self-assessment Tool:** A methodology to assess capacities of a parliament to respond to crisis prevention and recovery issues has been produced and was validated with regional parliamentary groups in the Arab States region, Central America and West Africa. The tool was piloted and used to design a support strategy for parliaments in Iraq, Togo, Bissau and Liberia.

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*“Parliaments play a role in crisis prevention by mainstreaming a conflict sensitive approach to law-drafting and constitution-making” - Hon. Bernadette Lahai, Member of Parliament, Sierra Leone*

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### Associated Organizations

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*ECOWAS Parliament in West Africa*  
*Parlacen and Parlantino in Central America*  
*Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*  
*United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC)*  
*The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*  
*Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor*  
*Yemen Parliamentary Watch*  
*West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)*  
*West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)*  
*Practitioners (European Commission, Canadian CIDA, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), USAID)*

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**West Africa Regional Parliamentary Working Group**

## 5. Global Activities

AGORA, a global platform to support parliamentary development (including crisis prevention) was launched in order to enhance information dissemination and knowledge sharing (<http://www.agora-parl.org/node/1057>) offering documents, guidelines to improve parliamentary performance on crisis prevention and recovery, success stories and knowledge products. Awareness raising videos and short movies on the important role parliaments can play in crisis prevention and recovery (CPR) have been produced to disseminate voices and testimonials from members of parliaments ([www. http://www.agora-parl.org/node/3159](http://www.agora-parl.org/node/3159)).

## 3. Country Based Initiatives

In **Togo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria** and **Iraq**: self-assessment tool piloted with national / regional parliaments and parliamentary committees to identify dedicated support to enhance the role national / regional parliaments can play in crisis prevention and recovery.

In **Tunisia**: Advisory services provided to the sub-committee on liberties with the draft of two political party laws.

In **El Salvador**: Advisory services to legislation drafting on violence against women. The Special law was approved in November 2010.

## 4. Regional Activities

Three parliamentary working groups were launched (Arab States, Central America and West Africa) and focused on security sector reform (SSR); mediation; political parties and statebuilding. Through Regional Workshops participants have generated south-south learning on issues such as community security (Central America), political violence (West Africa) as well as the role of parliamentary committees in mediation and conciliation (Arab States). The regional approach is supported by a knowledge platform, AGORA ([www.agora-parl.org](http://www.agora-parl.org)) with dedicated regional groups to support continued dialogue. The **3 main achievements** of these regional efforts to-day include:

- **Regional networks of champions established on crisis prevention and recovery.**
- **Regional benchmarks identified for parliamentary engagement on crisis prevention and recovery.**
- **Sensitive crisis prevention issues discussed and regional solutions identified by parliamentarians on gender-based violence, political violence and mediation role played by parliamentarians.**

*An effective parliamentary institution is strongly correlated with a viable democracy.*



## 6. Lessons learned

- ✓ **Supporting the development of effective and empowered parliaments and political parties** in post-crisis contexts is critical to the peace building agenda. This requires an engagement with political actors and support to individuals, parliamentary structures and the administration as well as support to processes that are highly political. The role of external actors is limited and sensitive thus it requires a high level of awareness of potential opportunities and risks.
- ✓ **Parliamentarians can act as actors in crisis prevention and post-conflict recovery** through mediation, the promotion of dialogue, the adoption of conflict sensitive laws which address the very sources of violence and a better representation of the population by increasing the political participation of women and minority groups. Many of these tools are new to parliamentarians in crisis-affected countries and there is a limited tradition of consensual leadership. Engendering cultural and behavioral changes is critical and requires sustained engagement and accompaniment.
- ✓ **The regional approach was recognized by the parliamentarians in the three regions as highly relevant** as it provided them with an open space to exchange inspiring good practices and challenges they face on sensitive issues such as personal security concerns, independence of the parliament from the executive, corruption when dealing with gender-based violence, independence from political parties' positions within the regions. This regional approach made parliamentarians less isolated in their opinions and questions on the role they can play on crisis prevention and recovery issues. However, translating the lessons at regional level into country strategies and actions is more challenging and requires comprehensive approaches.

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*“The strength of the national legislature may be a – or even the – key to democratization”*

*Mr. Steven Fish (Journal of Democracy)*

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### Regional seminar on Parliaments and CPR in the Arab States region



### Central America Parliamentary Working Group



## 7. Priorities in 2011

At the national level, seed funding has been allocated to Togo, Guinea-Bissau, Tunisia and the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Looking at the electoral calendar for 2011, democratic transitions and statebuilding processes, we will look at further supporting UNDP country offices to respond to the demands of parliaments to address these critical issues and remain available to service country offices, through our teams based in the regional Centres and headquarters. **In West Africa**, a parliamentary regional action plan will be validated together with the finalization of a handbook on Parliaments and Crisis Prevention and Recovery compiling regional research and national case studies. In the **Arab States region**, looking beyond Election Day, UNDP will build on its comparative experiences and utilize existing relevant regional and national projects and networks of partners and parliamentarians to provide assistance to ensure the creation of an enabling environment for inclusive legislative and constituent assemblies. In **Central America**, UNDP will facilitate the harmonization and standardization of legal frameworks in the region on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), immigration control, drug trafficking-related crimes, money laundering and private security services.