



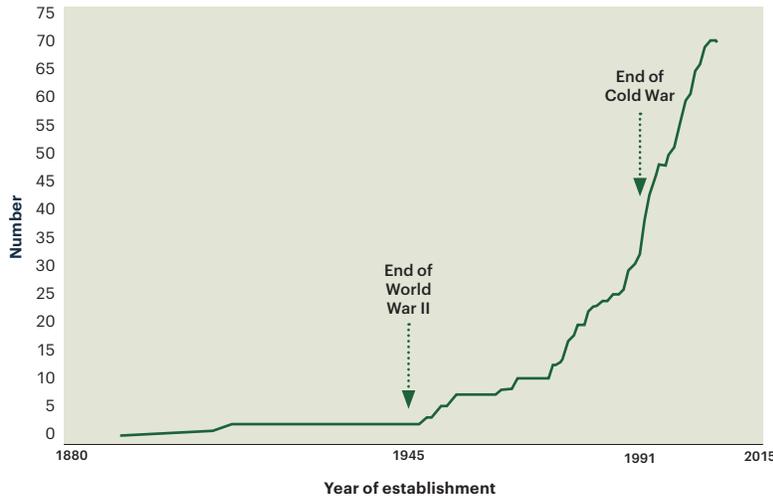
Create a UN Parliamentary Network as an advisory body to the UN General Assembly

RECOMMENDATION: Address the UN’s democracy and legitimacy deficits by establishing a UN Parliamentary Network (UNPN) as an advisory body to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Composed of individual members of national and regional parliaments—as well as representatives of existing parliamentary networks, institutions and possible local authorities—the UNPN would act as a platform for direct participation, input, and accountability claims by the peoples of the world on governance matters pertaining to the UN.

Global Challenge Update: The increasing transnational nature of global challenges requires a shared commitment to cooperation and collective action based on multilateral principles. Such action, however, requires both representative and legitimate decision-making, two elements that are insufficiently embedded within the UN system. At present, all 193 UN Member States are represented solely by the executive branch of national governments with no formal direct channels for legislative branch involvement.¹ Long before the creation of the UN, but particularly during and in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War,

numerous transnational parliamentary institutions were created during a “period of ‘parliamentarisation’ of international relations,” including popular regional bodies—at least 68 were identified in 2006 (see Figure 1).² Following the example of (sub-)regional governance institutions with parliamentary structures such as the European Union, the African Union, ECOWAS, and Mercosur, the UN General Assembly—the world’s most representative body of states—is long overdue in incorporating a formal structure to allow for direct input and oversight from parliamentarians irrespective of their political affiliation.

Innovation Proposal: With the long-term objective of creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly that affords greater citizen participation in global governance, the Albright-Gambari Commission recommended as an initial step introducing a parliamentary dimension to the General Assembly, by establishing a UNPN as a subsidiary consultative body to the UNGA.³ This can be achieved under Article 22 of the UN Charter and does not require Charter amendment. The UN Parliamentary Network would consist of individual parliamentarians who decide to opt-in, and they would have diverse political backgrounds

FIGURE 1: The Creation of International Parliamentary Institutions, 1889–2006

SOURCE: Šabič, Zlatko. “Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance: The Role of International Parliamentary Institutions,” 261. (Note: this is a redesign of the original chart.)

beyond that of their home country’s ruling-party. It could also include members of existing parliamentary networks, such as the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund or the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization.

The UNPN could focus on promoting transparency, oversight, and accountability within the UN system, as well as providing substantive inputs to the work of the General Assembly.⁴ The UNPN could further help to address concerns at the grassroots level about the benefits of multilateralism and to provide a platform for input from domestic populations (i.e., through public hearings with local constituents), local civil society groups, and the private sector—a key feature to facilitate

more accountable and inclusive decision-making at the global level.

Initially, the UNPN could meet every September and contribute ideas to the work of the UN General Assembly at the start of its new session and maintain an online platform for engagement throughout the year. In its composition, the UNPN could consist of several hundred standing members and its operations could be supported by the UN Secretariat.⁵ It could serve as a precursor to a more ambitious UN Parliamentary Assembly idea spearheaded by an over a decade-old campaign to establish a parliamentary assembly as a formal UN body that allows for optional direct elections of delegates.⁶ The campaign has received support from 1,600 current and former members of parliament, over 400 civil society groups and networks,

thousands of individuals from more than 150 countries, and Together 2030, an international coalition of more than 700 civil society organizations.⁷ The European (2018) and Pan-African Parliaments (2016) adopted resolutions supporting the proposal as well.

Strategy for Reform on the Road to 2020 (UN75): While the UN Parliamentary Assembly campaign has made important strides to expand the broad reach of supporting parliamentarians and civil society organizations, formalizing a full-fledged parliamentary body at the United Nations will require more time to garner sufficient political support. The UN Parliamentary Network idea, by contrast, is more realistic in nature and requires fewer political obstacles to be overcome. As the Albright-Gambari Commission proposed, ideas such as the UNPN should be tabled for discussion at high-level reform opportunities. In the lead-up to the UN75 Leaders Summit, on 21 September 2020, advocates of a UNPN and a UNPA should work to establish a “UNPN Group of Friends” consisting of Member States and influential civil society organizations interested in championing these initiatives. The Group of Friends could go public during September’s UNGA high-level segment. Including supportive parliamentarians worldwide too, the friends group could create opportunities to generate further momentum for the UN Parliamentary Network and United Nations Parliamentary Assembly post-2020.

ENDNOTES

1. Bummel, Andreas. “The Case for a UN Parliamentary Assembly and the Inter-Parliamentary Union,” *Democracy Without Borders*. 2019, 5
2. Šabič, Zlatko. “Building Democratic and Responsible Global Governance: The Role of International Parliamentary Institutions,” *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 2, Feb. 2008, 261.
3. Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance. “Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance.” *The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the Stimson Center*, June 2015, 86.
4. Cabrera, Luis. “Strengthening Security, Justice, and Democracy Globally: The Case for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly,” *The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the Stimson Center*. 2015, 15.
5. Bummel, *The Case for a UN Parliamentary Assembly*, 15.
6. *Ibidem*, 9.
7. UNPA Campaign website. *Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly receives Good Lobby Award*. 2019. Accessed January 23, 2019. <https://en.unpacampaign.org/>