



A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly

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Introductory questions

1) What is a parliamentary assembly?

In a parliamentary assembly elected representatives come together. In most cases a parliamentary assembly is an organ of an intergovernmental organization which is otherwise comprised of political appointments representing only the executive branch and the ruling parties of each member state. Members of a parliamentary assembly, in contrast, include delegates from each major political group in a state party's parliament. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is the oldest assembly of this kind.

2) Why should a Parliamentary Assembly at the UN be established?

The UN and the numerous organizations included in the UN's system such as the children's fund UNICEF or the refugee agency UNHCR are important hubs of international cooperation. A Parliamentary Assembly is intended to make the activities and decisions of these organizations as well as global governance in general more democratic, more transparent and more responsive to the needs of the world's citizens.

3) What purpose would a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations serve?

The purpose of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) is to give the citizens of UN member states a voice in political negotiations and decision-making at the global level. The assembly would provide independent oversight of the UN's bureaucracy and budget. With its members directly elected or appointed by national or regional parliaments, a parliamentary assembly would improve global governance by adding a democratic and independent complement to the existing intergovernmental bodies.

4) In what way is the UN undemocratic?

The United Nations is a forum of national governments, with its principle organs comprised of representatives and career officers of the executive branches of member states who are normally exclusively selected by the ruling majority party (or coalition). Thus, the diverse political spectrum within member states is not represented. In addition, each member state has one vote, regardless of population size. That way democratic representation of the world's population is not ensured.

5) Is there experience that can be used for a UNPA?

Parliamentary assemblies exist in numerous multilateral intergovernmental organizations, for example at the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, NATO, the African Union and in Mercosur, among others. In addition, it is possible to draw lessons from the development of the European Parliament, created as a consultative assembly in 1952 and evolving over decades to today's legislature directly representing almost 400 million voters.

6) Is the establishment of a Parliamentary Assembly compatible with the character of the UN as an intergovernmental organization?

The establishment of a UNPA would not change the nature of the UN as an organization of its member states. The fact that existing bodies and organs of the UN are composed of representatives of member states would not be affected by establishing a complementary Parliamentary Assembly.

Questions on the added value and the political relevance

7) What added value would a Parliamentary Assembly provide to the existing UN system?

The members of the UNPA would group by political affiliation rather than by national origin and thus would develop cross-border political identity. A more sophisticated global polity would emerge and mature. UN parliamentarians could be less considerate of diplomatic restraints, would be able to represent their constituents as well as the common interest of humanity and as independent representatives of the people could provide for better oversight of the UN's activities.

8) How can a Parliamentary Assembly improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of international decision-making?

Because of the proportional distribution of seats and the cross-national cooperation of independent delegates, decisions of the assembly would have strong symbolic legitimacy, acceptance and validity. An inclusion of the assembly into international decision-making thus would make international decisions more effective.

9) How can a Parliamentary Assembly contribute to making the UN's bureaucracy more efficient and transparent?

A UNPA could exercise independent democratic oversight by being vested with a range of participatory rights, for example of information sharing and summoning UN officials to testify at hearings. An assembly, for instance, could establish inquiry committees to carry out parliamentary investigations in cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services to pursue and resolve charges of fraud, corruption and squander within the UN system.

10) How would a Parliamentary Assembly contribute to peace?

As the members of a UNPA could easily form groups according to their shared political affiliations instead of their national origins, cross-national dialogue and peaceful international cooperation would be strengthened. Delegates with similar political points of view could collaborate across borders. Compared with political appointees, they would be freer to balance national priorities against common, cross-border interests.

11) How could a Parliamentary Assembly contribute to national democratization?

A UNPA would give a voice to representatives of national parliamentary opposition groups at the UN. Through their international office, opposition members would be in a better position to reach out to the international public. Their position in the home country would be

strengthened and a restriction of their rights through the government would be made more difficult. For delegates close to autocratic governments, the experience of participating in an assembly and of cooperating with other delegates from democratic countries could set a powerful example and have a democratizing effect. In addition, the UNPA would strengthen the credibility of the UN in promoting national democratization.

12) How could a Parliamentary Assembly help to strengthen human rights?

A UNPA could establish its own committee on human rights. This committee would not be under the direct influence of the governments. Different from government representatives on the Human Rights Council, the independent members of the assembly would be able to pay less attention to the diplomatic imperatives of their government and therefore could address human rights issues in a more open manner. In addition, the establishment of inquiry committees on specific situations would be possible. The assembly could also be vested with the right to bring situations to the attention of other parts of the system, including the Human Rights Council or the UN Security Council. In the case of genocide or other severe human rights violations the assembly could give a strong voice to the world public.

13) What role could a Parliamentary Assembly play in climate policy?

A different political dynamic would exist in a UNPA compared to current UN intergovernmental bodies and conferences. The members predominantly would be independent, many would belong to national opposition groups and they would organize in cross-national political groups. An assembly and its members thus would be in a better position to develop common global or multilateral solutions and to give less consideration to purely particularist national interests. Delegates would have more legitimate authority in representing the economic concerns of their constituents in regards to climate change remedies. Even as an advisory body, such recommendations and proposals from the assembly could carry significant moral weight and pressure national governments to adopt globally sustainable solutions.

14) How could a Parliamentary Assembly help to give minorities and indigenous peoples a voice?

First of all, representatives of indigenous peoples and minorities could be elected as delegates of a UNPA through the regular election procedure. In addition, a certain number of seats that are filled through a special procedure could be reserved for representatives of indigenous peoples and minorities. Additionally, the assembly could establish committees on indigenous and minority affairs that would help to bring more public attention to indigenous concerns.

15) How would civil society benefit from a Parliamentary Assembly?

A UNPA should provide efficient and innovative means of including civil society groups in its work. For instance this could be done through public hearings of the assembly's committees or co-option of temporary non-voting advisory members at the committee level. In addition, civil society groups can engage with assembly delegates individually. These opportunities would be complementary to existing forms of participation in the United Nations system.

16) How could the “man in the street” play a part in the activities of a Parliamentary Assembly?

Unlike with the current ambassadors in various UN bodies, citizens would be able to contact and directly lobby the assembly delegate who represents their country or constituency on issues that concern them. In those countries that progressively provide for the direct election of assembly delegates, citizens would take part in their initial and periodic election.

Relationship with other UN institutions and distinctions between them

17) What is the difference between the United Nations General Assembly and the proposed Parliamentary Assembly?

The United Nations General Assembly is enshrined in the UN Charter as the organization’s main body where the governments of the UN’s member states are represented with one vote each. The proposed UNPA would be a new subsidiary body, one that represents the world’s peoples and where the distribution of seats would be graduated. Members of national opposition groups would be represented in a Parliamentary Assembly, ensuring the body would reflect a broader political spectrum.

18) What is the difference between the proposed Parliamentary Assembly and a world parliament?

The proposed UNPA initially would have largely consultative and supervisory functions vis-à-vis the UN and the organizations of the UN family. In the beginning the assembly would likely be composed of members of national and regional parliaments. A world parliament by contrast is conceived as a body that is able to pass globally binding law and whose members are directly elected. The UNPA may be the first small step in the direction of the long-term goal of a world parliament.

19) What would be the relationship between a Parliamentary Assembly and the UN Security Council and the General Assembly?

The UNPA would complement the work of the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly as a consultative body. For example, the assembly could submit recommendations to the General Assembly or the Security Council for further consideration. As the assembly developed credibility and the confidence of the international community it could evolve and be included into decision-making at the UN General Assembly, for instance regarding the adoption of the UN’s budget or the election of the UN Secretary-General. In the long run, as part of a comprehensive reform of the UN, the UN General Assembly and the UNPA could become two chambers of a world parliament.

20) What would be the relationship between a Parliamentary Assembly and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization?

Over time, a UNPA would be vested with consultative functions and rights to information also vis-à-vis the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. This would be an important contribution to making global governance more coherent and systematic. Later, the UNPA could be endowed with rights of participation and oversight

as well. As the World Bank group, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization are legally independent international organizations, the functions of a Parliamentary Assembly would need to be enshrined through relationship agreements or by a change of those organizations' statutes, agreed to by the member states.

21) What is the difference between the proposed UNPA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union?

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is an independent association of national parliaments with a principle goal of strengthening the ability of national parliaments to exercise an oversight function of international activities at the national level. The purpose of the proposed Parliamentary Assembly by contrast is to exercise parliamentary functions directly at the international level, in its own right. One of the goals is to make UN executives and UN institutions accountable to a global parliamentary body. There is currently no interest by the IPU in assuming such a capacity.

22) What is the difference between a Global Parliamentary Assembly and a Parliamentary Assembly at the UN?

A *Global Parliamentary Assembly* and a *Parliamentary Assembly at the UN* are largely synonymous terms. Using the term of a *Global Parliamentary Assembly* stresses that the assembly should be linked to the work of all relevant intergovernmental organizations whereas a *UN Parliamentary Assembly* often is merely conceived as a first step in this direction by establishing it as a subsidiary body that is exclusively linked to the UN General Assembly. The term of a *Global Peoples Assembly* or *Global Parliamentary Assembly* is also used for a specific strategy towards a world parliament that is based on an intergovernmental treaty.

Questions on rights and powers

23) What are the subjects a Parliamentary Assembly could deal with?

The range of political issues that a UNPA should be entitled to address should closely parallel those on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. According to Article 10 of the United Nations Charter, a UNPA then could “discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter.”

24) Would it be possible for a Parliamentary Assembly to meddle in national affairs?

A UNPA would be a part of the United Nations and bound by those provisions of the UN Charter that state that the United Nations is not authorized “to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.” A UNPA thus would not be entitled to deliberate on issues which, according to established UN standards, would be qualified as an interference with the national sovereignty of member states.

25) What are the powers a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations could be vested with?

A UNPA in principle could be vested with all rights and powers with which the United Nations General Assembly is equipped. In the case of an amendment of the UN Charter rights

and powers could be enshrined that go beyond that. Initially an assembly could be equipped with a largely consultative role that would develop over time to include genuine rights of information, participation and oversight with a view of developing into a main organ that complements the UN General Assembly.

26) What rights of information, participation and oversight could be provided to a Parliamentary Assembly?

The rights of a UNPA could be extended incrementally as state parties decide is appropriate over time. For instance, it has been suggested the right (1) to put questions to the United Nations Secretary General and other senior multilateral officials, (2) to hold readings on draft resolutions including the right to suggest amendments, (3) to co-decide on the adoption of the regular budgets of the UN and its specialized agencies, (4) to participate in the election of the UN Secretary-General and other top officials, (5) to alert the United Nations Security Council on situations or (6) to submit legal questions to the International Court of Justice.

27) Would a world parliament restrict national sovereignty?

National sovereignty understood as the right and capacity to exercise to self-determination is already restricted. In today's global society many political questions necessarily need to be regulated transnationally. A world parliament would strengthen political autonomy and accountability as it would enable the peoples to directly participate in international decisions in a democratic way. According to the principle of subsidiarity only such questions should be regulated globally that can and must be effectively dealt with globally.

Legal questions on the establishment of an assembly

28) How can a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations be established?

A UNPA could be set up as a subsidiary body by a vote of the General Assembly under Article 22 of the UN Charter. Alternatively, it could be created on the basis of a new international treaty between governments followed by an agreement that defines its relationship with other UN organs and agencies. Thirdly, as part of a reform of the UN Charter the assembly could be enshrined directly in an amended and re-structured UN system.

29) Is an amendment of the UN Charter necessary to establish a UNPA?

It is possible to establish a UNPA without amending the UN Charter. If a UNPA is set up as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly under Article 22 of the United Nations Charter or on the basis of a new international treaty between governments, an amendment of the Charter would not be required.

30) Is an approval of the United Nations Security Council and its permanent members necessary to establish a UNPA?

Approval of the Security Council or its permanent members would only be required if the procedure to establish a UNPA involved an amendment of the United Nations Charter. If an assembly is set up as a subsidiary body by a vote of the UN General Assembly under Article 22 of the United Nations Charter or on the basis of a new international treaty between governments, this would not be the case.

Questions on location, functioning and financing

31) Where would the headquarters and the administrative seat of a Parliamentary Assembly be located?

Where a UNPA will have its headquarters would be decided during intergovernmental negotiations on its establishment and may depend on whether governments will be ready to provide suitable premises as a host country. It would be practical to choose a location where UN administrative offices are based, such as New York or Geneva. If a government offers an alternate suitable location, this could serve as an important incentive to locate the assembly elsewhere.

32) When, how often and for how long would a Parliamentary Assembly be in session?

As with all parliaments, one needs to keep in mind the distinction between the plenary sessions of all delegates, and sessions of specialized committees and their sub-committees that only committee members would attend. Initially, plenary assemblies could take place once per year or every two years for a few weeks, for example parallel to the general debate of the UN General Assembly. The plenary sessions of the assembly would be prepared in the committees that could hold meetings more frequently and more flexibly. Over time, an assembly itself would determine the most effective timing and duration of its sessions.

33) Where would the sessions of a Parliamentary Assembly take place?

Plenary sessions and meetings of an Assembly's committees could take place at its headquarters or alternately in different regions around the world. Internationally changing meeting venues in any case should be intended for the specialized committees and officials could also make fact-finding visits. This would contribute to bringing the work of the assembly closer to the world's regions and peoples.

34) What would a UNPA cost?

The possible costs of a UNPA are dependent of many important variables that have yet to be determined. This includes for example the number of delegates, salaries of delegates and their possible staff, the size of the administration, the frequency, length and the meeting venues of the plenary sessions, the committees and the sub-committees or the extent of the necessary translation services. Cost estimates should be handled by an independent international expert panel that is established by the United Nations itself as it considers establishing a UNPA.

35) How could a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations be financed?

The United Nations and its various programs and agencies are funded by combinations of assessed and/or voluntary contributions. If established as a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, a UNPA would likely be funded through the assessed UN regular budget. The budget would have to be expanded accordingly. However, other means of funding, including voluntary contributions by member states, should also be considered. In addition, a voluntary fund could be established and authorized to accept contributions from other political supporters under clearly defined terms.

On the composition, the election of delegates and the distribution of seats

36) From which countries could delegates to a UNPA be sent?

A UNPA would be open to all member states of the UN.

37) By whom would the delegates of a Parliamentary Assembly be elected?

A UNPA's member states should themselves be able to decide whether to have their delegates chosen by direct elections or indirectly from within their national parliament. In the latter case, the selection of delegates should reflect the existing political spectrum as closely as possible. In addition, delegates of regional parliaments and parliamentary assemblies could complement national delegates. Some have suggested the possibility of including cities and local authorities as well.

38) How could citizens of states without democratic elections be represented in a Parliamentary Assembly?

Countries in which no adequately free and fair elections exist should nevertheless be allowed to be represented by delegates in a UNPA as long as they are chosen from within the constitutional national parliament, inclusive of opposition factions. An appointment through the government would be impermissible, and rules allowing an assembly to judge the independence of its own members should be considered.

39) If universal membership is envisioned for a Parliamentary Assembly, what influence would non-democratic states have?

According to the 2016 Freedom House analysis on democracy in UN member states, 125 of the 193 members are "electoral democracies." According to various models for the distribution of seats a majority of the assembly's delegates would come from these democratic states so that the democratic character of an assembly could be ensured.

40) How would it be possible to strengthen the independence of delegates from their home governments?

While delegates from autocratic regimes may, to a degree, act according to the instructions of their home governments, the use of secret ballots, seating arrangements by political groups, and other procedural constraints would minimize non-democratic governments' influence on the independence of delegates. The Statutes of a Parliamentary Assembly, for instance, could prohibit governments tracking the voting behavior of individual delegates or unilaterally recalling delegates during their term of office.

41) How many delegates would a UNPA have?

The size of a Parliamentary Assembly should constitute an optimal balance between representativeness and efficiency. The smaller an assembly would be, the more efficient it could work but the less representative and democratic it would also be. The upper limit for efficient work that at the same time would ensure optimal representativeness lies approximately between 700 and 900 members. This is the size that most of the models take as a basis for the

distribution of seats. For comparison, the European Parliament is a 736-member body and the Indian national parliament includes 802 members.

42) How would the seats in the proposed UNPA be distributed?

The precise distribution of seats in a Parliamentary Assembly will have to be determined in international negotiations on its establishment. Unlike the “one-state, one-vote” composition of the UN General Assembly, a key feature of a Parliamentary Assembly should be that the number of delegates to be elected from the member states is graduated, with population size being an important criterion. However, to achieve a balance between the principles of democratic representation on the one hand and equality of states on the other, the principle of degressive proportionality could be applied, as in the U.S. Congress and in the European Parliament. Accordingly in small countries relatively more delegates could be elected than in large countries.

43) To what extent would populous countries like India and China be able to dominate an assembly through their share of seats?

If seats in a Parliamentary Assembly were allocated directly proportional to population size, then approximately 20 percent would be held by delegates of Chinese citizens and 17 percent by those representing citizens of India. The 128 states with the lowest population size would be represented by around 8 percent of the delegates. A directly proportional allocation would thus marginalize an overwhelming majority of countries and for this reason is not considered a valid democratic option. Instead we recommend a graduated distribution of seats according to the principle of degressive proportionality, in which smaller states have slightly higher representation proportional to their population. In proposed models of this nature, Chinese delegates would have a share of seats between 3 and 10 percent and Indian members between 2.8 and 9 percent. Finally it needs to be noted that delegates would cast their vote individually and not en bloc.

44) How many seats would go to country X, Y, Z?

The precise distribution of seats will have to be determined in international negotiations on the establishment of a Parliamentary Assembly. It is therefore speculative to say how many seats would go to a particular country. It has to be noted that the seats would not be controlled by governments but by individual independent delegates.

Support for the proposal and the international campaign

45) Who supports the proposal to establish a UNPA?

Close to 1,500 current and former parliamentarians from across the political spectrum as well as numerous non-governmental organizations and associations, leading academics, former UN officials and Nobel laureates from all over the world have spoken out in support of the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly. The European Parliament has endorsed the proposal repeatedly. Among other endorsers are the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin-American Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

46) What is the Campaign for a UNPA?

The international Campaign for a UNPA was launched in 2007. The campaign is an informal network that coordinates the work of supporters of a UNPA. Participants in the campaign are Members of Parliament, representatives of non-governmental organizations, academics, national coordinators, and other individual activists.

47) To what extent is the proposal for a Parliamentary Assembly at the UN supported by the general public?

In 2005 the opinion research institute GlobeScan has conducted a representative poll in 18 countries. Among other things, GlobeScan did explore the extent to which the respondents agreed to the proposal, to create “a new UN Parliament, made up of representatives directly elected by citizens, having powers equal to the current UN General Assembly.” In all 18 countries there was a majority support for this proposal. The international mean was 63 percent. The poll was conducted in Argentina, Australia, Brasil, Canada, Chile, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, U.K. and the U.S.

48) When will a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations be established?

In theory, Statutes of a UNPA could be negotiated and adopted within a few years. The quick establishment of the International Criminal Court from the start of international negotiations in 1995 until the entry-into-force of its Statute in 2002 serves as a precedent for speedy creation of an international institution. The creation of the Human Rights Council, a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly as a Parliamentary Assembly is envisioned, occurred in less than two years. Once taken up by the United Nations, establishment of a UNPA could be completed in a similarly short timeframe.

49) What is the next important milestone in the process of establishing a UNPA?

The next important milestone is to convince governments of the benefits of a Parliamentary Assembly at the UN. The goal is that a group of like-minded governments promotes the subject in the United Nations and brings about a decision of the United Nations General Assembly that launches a formal study, starts negotiations on Statutes and begins specific preparations for the establishment of an assembly.

50) When did the idea of a world parliament originally emerge?

An international parliament that is directly elected by the people was for the first time suggested in 1793 at the time of the French Revolution. The idea was more frequently discussed starting from the end of the 19th century and in the context of the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919.