

# 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.

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## EDITORIAL

*Parliaments are the cornerstone of an inclusive and representative*

*democracy. In post-conflict countries or countries in transition, parliaments are saddled with a bigger role: contributing to conflict resolution and peace building and addressing the social, economic, and political challenges.*

*Since 2005, the Iraqi Council of Representative has been playing an active political role, providing a platform for dialogue amongst the different groups, and a forum for conflict resolution. Despite this imperative task, it has also worked towards contributing to the socio-economic development through reforming the legal framework. A generous contribution from Mrs. Amira Al Baldawi, former member of the CoR, highlights the Council's role in reforming and passing new legislation to strengthen Iraq's economy.*

*A new Iraqi Council of Representative has been elected last March. This issue of the Arab Parliamentary Bulletin underlines Iraq's success in continuing its path towards democracy and organizing parliamentary elections despite the challenges, with women candidates winning seats in the parliament over and above the quota allocated to them. On this note, and in celebration of International Women's Day, another article on gender quotas emphasizes the importance of quotas as a step towards reversing women's under-representation in Arab parliaments.*

*We would like to thank our readers and contributors for their continuous support. We also invite parliamentarians and practitioners from the Arab region to share with us the experiences and success stories of Arab parliaments, hoping that by spreading the word we would be encouraging an increasing number of actors to promote good parliamentary practice across the Arab world.*

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OUR WEBSITE:  
[www.arabparliaments.org](http://www.arabparliaments.org)**

## Arab Parliaments' News

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### Algeria

Seminar on "Women in the Media"

4 March 2010

In cooperation with the Ministry for Family Affairs and Status of Women, Algeria's National Council hosted at its headquarters a seminar on "Women in the Media" on Thursday 4 March 2010. The President of the National Council, several government members, most women in the government, and members of the National Council and the National People's Assembly took part in the debate along with members of the academia, journalists and students.

### Lebanon

- Seminar on "Parliaments of the 21st Century – Challenges and Opportunities for Parliamentarians" – 19-20 January 2010

In cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Lebanese National Assembly organized a seminar on "Parliaments of the 21st Century – Challenges and Opportunities for Parliamentarians." Lebanese and British parliamentarians attended this seminar, in addition to a number of senior staff members from the Lebanese Assembly.

- Seminar on "Parliamentary Democracy" – 10 February 2010

In cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Lebanese National Assembly organized a seminar on "Parliamentary Democracy." Addressed to

the parliament's staff and secretaries, the seminar featured speakers from the University of Essex and the Lebanese University. Participants discussed the parliament's role and the patterns of representation, participation, integration and accountability. Equally tackled were the parliamentary activities and models of democracy within power-sharing structures.

- Workshop on "The Rule of Law and Human Rights for Parliaments" – 19-20 March 2010  
In cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Lebanese National Assembly organized a Workshop on



the Rule of Law and Human Rights for Parliaments during the period extending from 18 to 20 March 2010. Experts from the International Bar Association (IBA), the House of Commons' National Audit Office and lawyers from the Beirut Bar Association took

part in the workshop. Also present were staff members from most of the Assembly's departments concerned with parliamentary work, such as secretaries of parliamentary committees and members of the General Secretariat for External Affairs, the General Directorate for Studies and Information and the Translation and IT department.

### *Sudan*

On 4 February 2010, Sudan's National Assembly organized a Workshop for Women Parliamentarians on Electoral Monitoring. The workshop shed light on the electoral system as a mechanism for balanced political participation and addressed the elections'



constitutional and legal framework. Another presentation tackled electoral monitoring, international standards, and the oversight of civil society as a mechanism guaranteeing the integrity of the electoral process.

## Launch of “The Civic Network for Parliamentary Monitoring in the Arab World”

Al Quds Center for Political Studies organized a two-day regional workshop titled “Strengthening the Role of Civil Society in Monitoring Parliaments in the Arab World.” Held in Amman on 20-21 March 2010 in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the workshop brought together over 50 political and intellectual figures from eleven Arab countries.

Over two days, the participants reviewed the political development in their respective countries, addressing the role of CSOs in the democratization process. They also highlighted the experience of CSOs in monitoring parliaments and discussed the possible ways of overcoming the main challenges that they encounter, such as the difficult access to information.

With the region attaining different levels of experience in the area of parliamentary oversight, the participants underlined the importance of exchanging experiences and lessons in order to strengthen the role of CSOs in overseeing the parliaments' performance.

The workshop culminated in the launch of the Civic Network for Parliamentary Monitoring in the Arab World based on the advanced recommendations calling for a strengthening of regional cooperation among CSOs. The network will serve as a hub for the exchange of experiences and best practices in this field and will coordinate the efforts of civil society organizations in monitoring parliaments in their respective countries. The network is also expected to undertake many initial activities, such as launching a website and issuing newsletters and periodicals.

## Arab Legislation

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### *Iraq*

On Monday 25 January 2010, Iraq's Council of Representatives adopted the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations No. 12 of 2010. The law provides for the establishment of NGOs and the registration of Iraqi NGOs and local chapters of international NGOs, consecrating the right to join NGOs as enshrined in the Constitution.

### *Syria*

On 29 March 2010, Syria's People's Assembly adopted a new Law on Labor, regulating labor in the private sector. Under the law, employers are bound to provide social



security coverage for their employees, document labor contracts, refuse de facto resignations, grant employees a regular increase in wages, grant women the right to a maternity leave, increase annual, death and marriage leaves, provide medical insurance, and ensure on-the-job safety.

## Regional Activities

### The 16th Conference for the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1-4 March 2010, Egypt

At the invitation of the Palestinian National Council and the Egyptian People's Assembly, the 16th Conference for the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union was held in Cairo, gathering delegations representing AIPU members. Equally present as observers were representatives of the following organizations: the League of Arab States, the Arab Transitional Parliament, the Association of Secretaries General of Arab Parliaments, the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the African Parliamentary Union, the Association of Senates, Shura and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World (ASSECAA), and the National Conference of State Legislatures. In addition to discussing the Arab strategy for the promotion of education and culture and the preservation of identity, the Conference aimed at restoring and strengthening solidarity among Arab countries.

## In The Spotlight

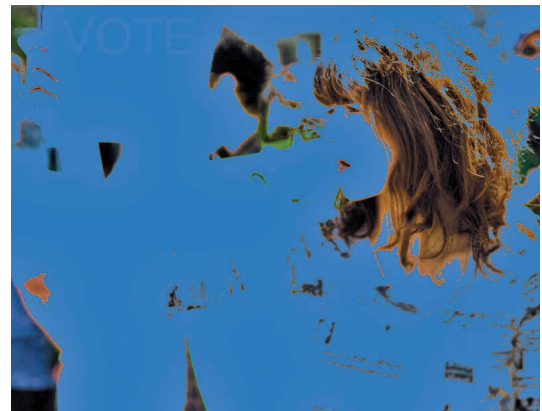
### GENDER QUOTAS AT THE PARLIAMENTARY LEVEL: A STEP TOWARDS REVERSING WOMEN'S UNDER-REPRESENTATION

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Arab women have achieved significant progress over the past decades. Once marginal in some parts of the Arab world, female education has reached unprecedented levels. Important progress can also be noted at other social levels. The proportion of women in the workforce has risen considerably across the region and women now enjoy better access to health and other social services.

However, for many reasons which we are not going to delve into in this brief article, Arab women continue to face considerable challenges when it comes to political participation. As showed in Table 3, the Arab region lags behind other regions in the world regarding the share of women in national assemblies. For this reason, a number of countries in the region have reserved a quota for women in parliamentary elections in an attempt to enhance women's participation in the public sphere. Even though these quota systems are discriminatory in nature, they were adopted in many countries around the world to encourage the participation of the oft excluded, under-represented or marginalized groups. Significant efforts have been deployed over the past decades at the international level to reverse women's under-representation in decision-making bodies. The 1979 Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women calls for equal participation of men and women in public life. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, for its part, compels governments to ensure gender balance in power structures and decision-making bodies even if they had to resort to positive action when need be. More recently, the UN Millennium Declaration emphasized gender equality with the third Millennium Development Goal centered on "promoting gender equality and empowering women."

Still, many social and traditional obstacles prevent or



restrain women's political participation, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Therefore, gender quotas should be regarded as a temporary measure intended to offset the impact of these obstacles which prevent women from having their reasonable share of seats, and, as such, should not be perceived as a discriminatory tool to differentiate women from other segments of society.

Except for the short-lived Egyptian experience between 1979 and 1986 following a presidential decree that reserved 30 seats in parliament for women, the quota system was effectively introduced in the region in the past decade. Six countries have indeed adopted gender quotas at the parliamentary level. Egypt (2009), Sudan (2008), Jordan (2003) and Djibouti (2002) amended their legislation to allocate a reserved number of seats for women, while Mauritania (2006) and Iraq (2004) imposed a share for women on electoral lists. Morocco, on the other hand, has reformed its election law to include a national list which, through an agreement among political parties, has guaranteed around 10% of the lower house's seats to women.

Lebanon reviewed its electoral law ahead of the

2009 parliamentary elections. Among the recommendations of the National Electoral Commission was the introduction of a 30% women quota on electoral lists. However, the electoral law that was ultimately ratified by the parliament overlooked this recommendation, and the proposal was dropped.

women both at the level of the party and the parliament.

However, many still doubt that these measures, important as they are, have had a significant impact on women's participation in political life. Raising the awareness of different segments of society, encouraging inclusive policies and institutions and

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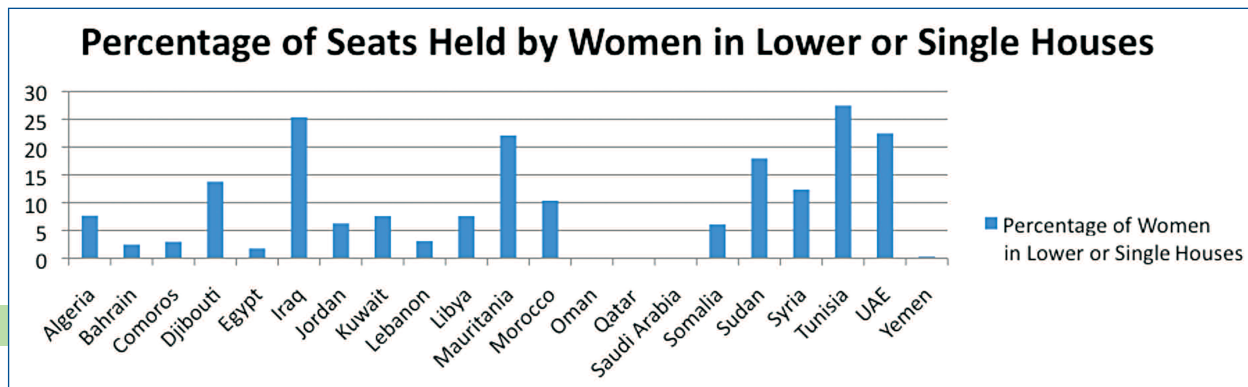
In general, countries that introduced gender quotas have a more significant female presence in their parliaments, as is shown in Figure 2. Interestingly though, the highest share of women in the lower house is registered in Tunisia, a country that did not adopt a parliamentary quota, but where the ruling party has opted for a stronger representation of

developing competences remain essential for promoting women's political participation in the Arab region. Adopting quota systems is but a first step in the long process of empowering women and strengthening their involvement in the public sphere.

Table 1

Country	Year quota adopted	Lower/Single House			Upper House		
		Quota type	Total seats	Seats held by women	Quota type	Total seats	Seats held by women
Algeria		Not legislated	389	30		136	4
Bahrain			40	1		40	10
Comoros			33	1			
Djibouti	2002	Reserved seats	65	9			
Egypt	2009	Reserved seats	442	8		264	18
Iraq	2004	Legislated Candidate Quotas	325	82			
Jordan	2003	Reserved seats	110	7		55	7
Kuwait			65	5			
Lebanon		Not legislated	128	4			
Libya			468	36			
Mauritania	2006	Legislated Candidate Quotas	95	21	Legislated Candidate Quotas	56	9
Morocco		Not legislated	325	34		270	3
Oman			84	0		70	14
Qatar			35	0			
Saudi Arabia			150	0			
Somalia		Reserved seats	539	33			
Sudan	2008	Reserved seats	443	80		50	3
Syria			250	31			
Tunisia		Not legislated	214	59		112	17
UAE			40	9			
Yemen			301	1		111	2

Source: Quota Project



Share of women in national assemblies, by region			
Region	Single or Lower House	Upper House	Both Houses Combined
Nordic countries	42.1%		
Americas	22.2%	21.7%	22.1%
Europe - OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	21.9%	19.8%	21.4%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	19.9%	19.8%	19.9%
Asia	18.7%	16.4%	18.5%
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.4%	20.4%	18.8%
Pacific	13.2%	32.6%	15.3%
Arab States	10.1%	7.6%	9.5%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, February 2010

## Workshop on Political Ethics and Conflict of Interest: Beirut, 18 - 19 February 2010

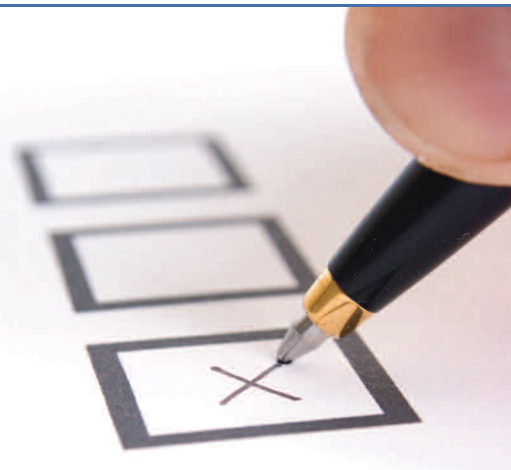
On 18 and 19 February, the Arab Region Parliamentarians Against Corruption (ARPAC) organized a workshop in Beirut in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy under their joint project "Political Ethics and Conflict of Interest."

Parliamentarians and experts on political ethics and conflicts of interest from Arab countries (Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, OPT, Jordan, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt) attended the workshop.

Parliamentarians had the opportunity to explore the potential ways of putting to use the Global Guidebook on Parliamentary Ethics which was presented during the workshop. Participants also discussed the reality of political ethics and conflicts of interest in their respective countries.

## In Focus

### THE 2010 ELECTIONS OF THE IRAQI 8 COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES



The elections of the Iraqi Council of Representatives were ultimately held on March 7, 2010 after arduous efforts to amend the Election Law. On December 9, 2009, the law amending Election Law number 16 of 2005 was enacted. Then on December 13, 2009, the presidency council ratified the Council of Representatives' Law number 24 of 2009, which includes the explanatory memorandum to the Election Law. The new law introduced many amendments. It increased the Council's seats to 325 seats from 275, allocating 310 seats to the 18 Iraqi governorates and allotting 15 compensatory seats, 8 of which to the minorities. The new law reaffirmed the 25% quota for women in the Council of Representatives, and the same rolls of the population census were adopted as in the 2005 elections based on the food ration cards, with a 2.8% population growth to be added annually per governorate. The new law introduced the open list and multiple-member constituencies electoral system, whereby Iraq was divided into different constituencies equivalent to the number of governorates. The law also entitled Iraqis living abroad to cast their ballots.

6,292 candidates from 86 political entities and coalitions vied in the elections. The most notable alliances were the following:

1. The Iraqi National Alliance
2. The State of Law Coalition
3. The Unity of Iraq Coalition
4. The Iraqi Accord Front
5. The Iraqi List (Al Iraqiya)
6. The Kurdistan Alliance

The Independent High Electoral Commission registered more than 78,926 international and local observers. 30 international organizations and 300 local organizations were registered.

#### *Special Voting*

Army members, police officers, patients in hospitals and prisoners cast their ballots on March 4, 2010 in an early voting process marked with acts of violence amidst accusations of incomplete electoral lists. Polling centres were targeted in Baghdad despite the tight security measures imposed to protect 950,000 eligible voters, 670,000 of whom were members of the security forces and the army.

#### *Out-Of-Country Voting*

As part of the Independent High Electoral Commission's preparations to organise the parliamentary elections outside Iraq, the Council of Commissioners set up [a committee to oversee the elections abroad](#).

16 foreign countries accepted to host polling centres, thus allowing their Iraqi residents to vote. The three-day voting process outside Iraq ended on the date scheduled for the elections in Iraq, i.e. on the 7th of March 2010. A total of 272,016 voters cast their votes outside Iraq as follows:



Country	Number of Voters	Country	Number of Voters
Syria	42,965	Canada	12,428
Sweden	36,931	Netherlands	12,300
The United States	27,754	Australia	12,068
Jordan	24,717	Denmark	9,328
Iran	23,554	Turkey	6,305
Germany	19,474	Egypt	4,917
The United Kingdom	17,873	Lebanon	3,787
The United Arab Emirates	16,036	Austria	1,579

### *In-Country Voting*

There were 19 million registered voters divided among 10 thousand polling stations. More than 12 million voters cast their ballots, i.e. a percentage of 62.40%, which falls short of the

turnout during the 2005 elections but is deemed higher than the turnout in the 2009 local elections. Dahouk province registered the highest turnout with 80%. Turnout came as follows in Iraq's 18 provinces:

Governorate	Turnout (in percentage)	Governorate	Turnout (in percentage)
Dahouk	80%	Qadissiya	62%
Irbil	76%	Anbar	61%
Sulaimaniya	73%	Najaf	61%
Kirkuk	73%	Muthanna	61%
Salah Eddine	73%	Wasset	60%
Nineveh	66%	Zi Kar	60%
Babel	63%	Basra	57%
Kerbala	62%	Baghdad	53%
Diyala	62%	Missan	50%



### Participation of Women

A total of 1,815 women ran for elections, winning 82 seats in the Council of Representatives in Iraq's constituencies (25.2%) compared to 70 seats in the past. 21 female candidates garnered the needed votes to reach the electoral threshold without relying on the quota, while 61 other women won seats thanks to the female quota. Al Iraqiya list won the highest number of female seats (25) followed by the State of Law Coalition (23), the Iraqi National Alliance (19), the Kurdistan Alliance (12), the Change List (2) and finally the Rafidayn List with only one winning female candidate.

### The Results of the Elections

As shown by the [final results declared by the Independent High Electoral Commission](#) on 27 March 2010, the Al Iraqiya coalition ranked first with 89 seats and 2 compensatory seats, bringing the total number of seats to 91. The

State of Law coalition followed with 87 seats and two compensatory seats, i.e. a total of 89 seats. The Iraqi National Alliance won 70 seats including 2 compensatory seats, compared with 43 seats for the Kurdistan Alliance, including one compensatory seat. In the governorates of Kurdistan, the Change electoral list won 8 seats compared to 4 seats for the Kurdistan Islamic Union, and 2 seats for the Islamic Group of Kurdistan. The Iraqi Accord Front in the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, and Baghdad secured 6 seats, while the Unity of Iraq Coalition won 4 seats in the provinces of Salah Eddine, Nineveh, and Anbar.

As for the minorities, the Christian component won 5 seats, three for the Rafidayn list and two for the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council. Also, the Yazidis, represented by the Yazidi Movement for Reform, the Shabak and Sabeen each won one seat.

List/Coalition	Number of Seats
Al Iraqiya Coalition	91
State of Law Coalition	89
Iraqi National Alliance	70
Kurdistan Alliance	43
Change List	8
Kurdistan Islamic Union	4
Islamic Group of Kurdistan	2
Accord List	6
Iraqi Unity Coalition	4

Sources:  
[The Independent High Electoral Commission](#)  
[Al Jazeera](#)  
[Annahar newspaper](#)  
 News agencies

# Parliamentary Contribution

## THE IRAQI PARLIAMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### Dr. Amira Al-Baldawi

Former member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives and the Parliamentary Economic Committee



#### Introduction

Ever since the election of Iraq's Council of Representatives in 2005 and up to the present date, the country's key priority has been to restore security and fight terrorism. Iraq has also showed a growing interest in reinforcing national unity and reconciliation and entrenching the new political system.

With the numerous dangers looming throughout the past four-year parliamentary term, economy and development never topped the priorities of parliamentary legislation, or the national committees established to develop different sectors. However, despite its political and security concerns, the parliament has adopted a series of laws establishing market economy, and although few, these laws

are crucial and worth analyzing. They can be classified as follows:

#### Laws on Investment

Iraq lacks a modern investment law. The 2002 Arab Investment Law allows Arab investors to benefit from investment opportunities in Iraq and imposes strict restrictions in sharp contrast with the privileges provided for in other investment laws in the region. The Economic Committee has therefore strived to adopt a general investment law that grants Arab and foreign investors multiple privileges and rights.

- Investment Law No. 13 of 2006:

In addition to establishing the National Investment Commission responsible for drawing up Iraq's national investment policies and plans, the new law has set up investment commissions in the regions and governorates and determined the investors' obligations as well as the guarantees, privileges and exemptions they are entitled to.

This crucial law has paved the way for an investment-friendly legislative environment even though it has not created wider investment opportunities. A number of conferences were held over the past two years to encourage local and foreign investment and identify obstacles to investors and investment projects in governorates, hence the highlighted need to add or amend several articles in the law and provide investors with new privileges. Yet, several relevant laws, such as those related to



customs, business, taxes, and banks remain to be amended to create an environment conducive for investment.

- **Investment Law for Refining Crude Oil, No. 64 of 2007:**

The Council of Representatives adopted this law to encourage the private sector, both local and foreign, promote investment, foster economic development and build an industrial base related to crude oil refining. In addition, the law obliges companies to allocate 75% of their jobs to the Iraqi labor force in an attempt to curb unemployment and create new job opportunities.

- **Law No. 29 of 2007 on the Accession of the Republic of Iraq to the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency:**

The Council of Representatives intended through this law to create an environment conducive for investment in light of the privileges granted by the Agency, thus promoting the prospects of development.

### ***Economic Laws Important for Producers and Consumers***

The Economic Committee has drafted a package of economic laws deemed important for producers, consumers and the overall market. These laws are crucial, especially that Iraq, which currently enjoys observer status in the WTO, is seeking to accede to the international organization. In parallel, Iraq

pursues the negotiations to meet requirements of accession, such as streamlining relevant economic legislation with international conventions. These laws include:

- **Law on Consumer Protection:**

This recently drafted law will disseminate a new culture whereby consumers are allowed to take influential decisions that are not only based on supply and demand, but also on improvement of quality and services. Under this law, the Consumer Protection Board was established to develop consumer protection policies and programs, receive consumer complaints, conduct necessary inquiries through committees, take relevant decisions, guarantee and define consumer rights, prevent illegal practices, raise consumer awareness, and cooperate with the recently established consumer protection organizations in need of mission support and definition.

- **Iraqi Products Protection Law:**

The new market economy has increased imports of goods. This necessary transformation must be coupled with the protection of Iraq's local products, national industry and domestic private sector. Our local products are currently unmarketable with similar products of different origins and lower prices flooding the Iraqi market. In fact, countries subsidize some of their local products then export them at very low prices. These products, which may not necessarily be of good quality, would attract a consumer rush. States have the right to determine the criteria and regulations that govern the import of some goods to maintain the competitiveness of their local products. Because of its open import policy, Iraq has fallen victim to dumping policies practiced by neighboring countries. The Iraqi Products Protection Law determines mechanisms to protect Iraqi products and industry from harmful practices such as dumping, unjustified increase in imports, and the import of subsidized products. These are

global practices. In fact, China has recently adopted preemptive measures, including protectionist fees imposed on the import of methanol from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia and New Zealand, to avoid dumping in the Chinese market, which could cause great loss to local producers. In parallel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia adopted similar measures towards competing Chinese products, in line with the reciprocity policy.

This law is considered to be one of the most important laws that the Council of Representatives ratified before the end of its mandate. It provides for practices that create an environment conducive for a national competitive industry, both locally and internationally.

- **Law of Customs:**

This recently adopted law repealed Law No. 77 of 1955 and other laws adopted by the Coalition Provisional Authority. For example, the CPA Trade Liberalization Policy of 2004 lifted all custom duties on incoming goods. Local production almost came to a halt and was unable to compete with the imported, duty-free foreign goods that failed to meet the set specifications or conditions, thus damaging several of Iraq's lucrative industries. As a result, the Iraqi private sector and capitals fled the market. This CPA Policy was drafted to meet the requirements of WTO accession. It organized custom duties according to a common international system known as the Harmonized System. The Iraqi Council of Representatives adopted the Law of Customs during the last legislative session.

- **Law on Competition and Anti-Monopoly:**

For the first time, Iraq has adopted a law to encourage competition in trade according to market mechanisms and to prevent monopoly. Iraq is the sixth Arab country to adopt such a law that establishes a Council for Competitiveness and the Prevention of



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Monopoly. As a matter of fact, the Council of Representatives is responsible for spreading the culture of competition, protecting, encouraging and regulating competition, and preventing the monopoly of goods and services, which is harmful to consumers. This law is intended to encourage the private sector, promote its productivity and contribution to GDP, improve the quality of products, and decrease production costs and prices, thus supporting local economy.

### *Participation of Iraqi MPs in Development Committees*

With many central issues other than economic activity vying for attention to top the priority list, several development plans for certain industries and sectors are underway. Different parliamentary committees actively contributed to drafting these plans, including the Youth Development Strategy, the Five-Year Development Plan, the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction, and the Higher National Committee for the WTO. The National Strategy for Poverty Reduction was implemented in Iraq, highlighting the poverty rate and the poverty gap. The strategy determined 6 means to remedy poverty in Iraq, namely providing higher income-generating jobs for the poor, improving sanitary and educational conditions, providing a better environment and housing with effective social protection. The Higher Committee for the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction grouped representatives

from most relevant government agencies and 3 MPs from the Economic Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Education Committee. This joint Iraq-World Bank strategy is expected to achieve several projects targeting the poor.

### ***Laws on Budgeting and Public Investment***

In the absence of mid-term and long-term economic plans, the National Budget, annually discussed and adopted within the Council of Representatives, is an annual development plan for the government to set expense priorities. The National Budget includes Revenues and Expenses. Expenses include Current Expenses such as wages, salaries, assets, maintenance and others, whereas Investment Expenses are the basis for economic development and service provision.

As the system shifts towards decentralization and governorates are granted administrative and financial prerogatives as per the Governorates Law, budget laws stipulate that Investment Expenses cover government allocations in investment projects in governorates and allocations for the development of provinces and governorates, which are part of the investment expenses, and distributed to governorates according to the number of inhabitants, after deducting 17% for the Kurdistan Province.

The Parliament as well as the Finance and Economic Committees examine the draft

budget annually, present their reports and suggestions to improve the allocations for some sectors, then ensure follow-up with executive authorities. Over the past four years, budget laws have sparked controversy, often leading to months-long delay in the adoption of the laws. However, through its two relevant committees, the Council of Representatives is gaining more experience in examining the budget, increased maturity in decision-making and increased knowledge on lobbying the government for reform and change.

The Parliament's vote on budget is vital for economic development especially that 90% of budget revenues originate from the sale of crude oil. These revenues fund Iraq's strategic projects to achieve economic and social development.

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1. Article (62), paragraph 2 of the Iraqi Constitution determined the role of the Council of Representatives, which is authorized to conduct transfers among the sections and chapters of the general budget, reduce the total of its sums or suggest an increase in total expenses.

## Regional Activities

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### ***International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments Paris, 2-4 March 2010***

The World Bank Institute and the United Nations Development Programme organized the "International Conference on Benchmarking and Self-Assessment for Democratic Parliaments" in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the European Parliament Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

The WBI-hosted conference brought together parliamentarians and practitioners from around the world. Participants, who were introduced to the major benchmarks for democratic parliaments and self-assessment frameworks developed by different parliamentary organizations, discussed the thematic areas of consensus that have emerged from the work on benchmarking and self-assessment tools. Regional experiences as well as several national case studies of countries that have experimented with self assessment tools were presented and discussed. Participants also focused on the role of the benchmarks and self-assessment frameworks in guiding the parliamentary development practitioners and donors in designing better support programs.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to launch AGORA, the new knowledge hub for parliamentary development.

### ***The IPU's 122nd Assembly***

Bangkok hosted between March 27 and April 1st, 2010 the Inter-Parliamentary Union's [122<sup>nd</sup> Assembly](#).

During the meeting which was attended by more than 600 parliamentarians from 124 countries, 4 resolutions were adopted on key issues including the global fight against organized crime, international solidarity with Haiti and Chile, promotion of the South-South and triangular cooperation to achieve the MDGs, and youth participation in the democratic process. The resolutions highlighted the role that parliaments could play in addressing these issues.

### ***"Sustaining a Global Recovery" Paris, 18 February 2010***

OECD organized a high-level parliamentary seminar titled "[Sustaining a Global Recovery](#)" in Paris on the 18th of February 2010, bringing together parliamentarians from over 40 countries. Discussions focused on how to sustain a global recovery following the financial crisis that affected both developed and developing countries. Among the discussed topics were coping with the social impact of the crisis, green growth, transparency and integrity in the public and corporate sector.

## Our Activities

## Knowledge Building

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### *Towards Strengthening the Oversight Function of Arab Parliaments Focus Group Meeting*

As part of its efforts to build the capacities of Arab Parliaments, UNDP's Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) has launched a new regional working group on Strengthening the Oversight Function of Arab Parliaments with the key objectives of reviewing the legal framework, identifying the parliament's oversight prerogatives across the Arab countries, fostering regional dialogue on the strengths and weaknesses of the regulatory framework, and exploring the possible areas of reform. In addition, the working group will closely examine the capacity of Arab parliaments to exercise their oversight function as set out in the constitution and parliamentary regulations as well as their legal capacity to keep a check on the governments' work, holding them accountable for the policies they design and implement.

Heeding the participants' recommendations during the [October 2009](#) regional meeting of the working group, PDIAR organized a Focus Group Meeting in Beirut on 1-2 April 2010. During the meeting which brought together a number of experts from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen, the participants identified general principles that would assist parliamentarians in revising and reforming their parliaments' internal regulations with a view to strengthening the oversight function of parliaments. The participants also reviewed the draft version of the recently commissioned Regional Comparative Study on the Oversight Role of Upper Houses in the Arab Region.

The identified general principles are expected to be discussed and adopted during a regional working group meeting scheduled for June 2010. This regional workshop will seek to build consensus among MPs and senior parliamentary officials representing most Arab parliaments on the general principles document, which is intended as a guidance and advocacy tool for future reform initiatives.

### *Launch of AGORA*

AGORA, the Portal for Parliamentary

Development, was officially launched in the presence of over 150

Members of Parliament, delegates of international organizations, and representatives of parliamentary associations, at the headquarters of the Paris-based French National Assembly on the 2nd of March 2010. The event marked the birth of the first virtual platform for knowledge sharing on parliamentary development.



AGORA is a reference hub for knowledge sharing on parliamentary development. It targets parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, donors and practitioners, as well as academics, civil society and the media.

It seeks to consolidate knowledge, information, expertise and best practices and encourages collaboration among the worldwide parliamentary development community. In addition, it seeks to promote the streamlining of parliamentary development activities and advocates for parliamentary development globally.

The public part of the portal offers extensive information on parliamentary development, whereas a restricted access platform will act as a virtual meeting space for registered members. The Portal is currently operational in English and French and will shortly be available in Spanish, Arabic and Russian.

### *OECD Recommendation on Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying*

On 18 February 2010, the OECD Council approved the OECD Recommendation on [Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying](#). The Principles aim at providing policy-makers in the executive and legislative branches with guidance on how to promote good governance principles in lobbying.