

Event Report

“Increasing parliaments’ engagement with human rights”

UN General Assembly Building – Conference Room 11, New York City, United States
Monday, 14 October 2019, (13.00 –14.30)

Introduction

A side event on “Increasing parliaments’ engagement with human rights” was organized on 14 October 2019, at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Universal Rights Group, and the Parliaments, Rule of Law and Human Rights research project.¹ The event was co-sponsored by nine Permanent Missions to the United Nations: *Chile, Ecuador, Georgia, Maldives, Morocco, the Philippines, Portugal Romania, and Spain.*

Approximately 70 participants attended, including representatives of member states, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, OHCHR, and UN staff. Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour made introductory remarks, and was followed by a panel moderated by Ecuadorian Ambassador and Permanent Representative Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, who also welcomed interventions from co-sponsoring states before starting the panel discussion. Several representatives from co-sponsoring states made interventions, including Morocco, the Philippines, Portugal and Romania. The panel was composed of Ms. Sopio Kiladze MP, Chairperson of the Georgian Parliament’s Committee on Human Rights and Civil Integration; Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Chief of the UPR Branch, OHCHR; and Mr. Murray Hunt, Director of the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law.

The overall purpose of the side event was to increase awareness at the UN General Assembly of the work being done to increase parliamentary engagement with human rights and, specifically to:

- Highlight the findings of the OHCHR report ([A/HRC/38/25](#)) prepared, in close cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), on “Contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review”, including the results of OHCHR’s worldwide survey of parliaments and their engagement with human rights, pursuant to HRC resolution 35/29, and OHCHR’s recommendations with regards to the establishment of parliamentary committees on human rights, and international consideration of [draft Principles on Parliaments and Human Rights](#);
- Consider the concrete experience of senior Members of Parliament in terms of their parliaments’ human rights engagement, in particular at committee level;
- Share good practices on parliament’s engagement with human rights and discuss possible next steps.

¹ The Parliaments, Rule of Law and Human Rights research project is co-hosted by the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and the University of Oxford’s Faculty of Law, and funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council. More information about the research project and its output can be found at the following link: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/parliaments>

Background

Enhancing the role of parliaments in the protection and realisation of human rights is emerging as a crucial way to bridge the “implementation gap” in human rights. Numerous parliaments around the world have started to prioritize human rights and engage with the UN human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In its latest resolution ([35/29](#)) on this topic, the Human Rights Council (HRC) acknowledged the crucial role that Parliaments play in translating international commitments into national policies and laws, especially the recommendations supported by the State in the framework of the UPR. The UN Secretary-General has encouraged a more proactive engagement of parliamentarians in the work of international human rights mechanisms, including through the development of principles that would assist and guide them ([A/72/351](#), paras. 35-37). Parliaments are uniquely positioned to contribute to closing the implementation gap. Indeed, within the context of the UPR, 50-70% of recommendations require or involve parliamentary action.

OHCHR in consultation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conducted a survey on parliaments and their engagement with human rights, pursuant to HRC resolution 35/29. The survey provided a useful overview of current practices of parliamentary human rights committees around the world, describing their engagement with UN human rights mechanisms. OHCHR has published a report ([A/HRC/38/25](#)) summarizing its findings, and suggesting the establishment of parliamentary human rights committees to lead and coordinate parliament’s role in promoting and protecting human rights. The OHCHR report also includes some [Draft Principles on Parliaments and Human Rights](#) to provide guidance on the establishment and functioning of parliamentary human rights committees.

Executive Summary

(Part 1) *Ecuador’s Permanent Representative* encouraged States to look into the recommendations laid out in the OHCHR report ([A/HRC/38/25](#)), and more importantly, to consider what the General Assembly could do to promote parliamentary engagement with human rights and possibly endorse the draft principles annexed to the report.

Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant-Secretary General for Human Rights reiterated the important role of parliaments in protecting and promoting human rights, and stated OHCHR’s belief that parliaments need to engage frequently with civil society organizations, and to defend them from attacks. He pledged OHCHR’s cooperation in the formation of parliamentary human rights committee, and closed by stating that he looked forward to increasing OHCHR’s work on this topic.

Representatives of Morocco, the Philippines, Portugal and Romania spoke in support of the side event, the ideas contained in the OHCHR report, and shared examples of good practices of parliamentary engagement with human rights based on their countries’ experience.

(Part 2) *Ms. Sopio Kiladze MP, Chairperson, Georgian Parliament’s Committee on Human Rights & Civil Integration* said that the Georgian Parliament plays a crucial role in promoting and respecting human rights, and shared about the Georgian Parliament’s activities through its legislative and oversight functions. Georgia will continue to strengthen the role of Parliament, in order to achieve better protection of the well-being of individuals.

Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Chief of the UPR Branch, OHCHR spoke about the OHCHR report, sharing that the responses to the questionnaire informing the report show overwhelming support from respondents with a parliamentary human rights committee, for the development by the UN, of international principles on parliaments and human rights. The draft principles annexed to the OHCHR report highlight the key functions of a parliamentary human rights committee as well as elaborate upon its composition and working methods. OHCHR also recommends that parliamentarians participate in the preparation of state reports for the UPR and treaty bodies, participate in the UPR Working Group, and play a leading role in the implementation and follow-up of recommendations made by UN human rights mechanisms and other regional mechanisms.

Mr. Murray Hunt, Director, Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law shared about the important roles of parliament in legitimating human rights and implementing human rights obligations. He also shared about the recent [inquiry](#) by the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee, which engaged many stakeholders over a year, and used the draft principles to examine its own capacity to protect and promote human rights, demonstrating the value of the draft principles in providing guidance to parliaments that want to increase their engagement with human rights.

(Part 3) During the panel discussion, members of civil society asked about (i) the relevance of the side event to developing countries with different contexts; (ii) how to address the issue of parliamentary human rights committees misinterpreting human rights regressively; (iii) the issue of violence against women, including threats against women parliamentarians.

(Part 4) Finally, in the Third Committee's general debates following the side event, Ecuador and Georgia made national statements building on the ideas discussed at the side event.

1. Opening statements

H.E. Mr. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ecuador chaired and moderated the event. He briefly introduced work that had been done at the Human Rights Council (HRC) over the past five years to strengthen parliamentary engagement with the work of the HRC and its Universal Periodic Review, including a series of regional seminars with parliamentarians; panel discussions at the HRC; workshops for parliamentarians on the side-lines of the Council; as well as an inter-sessional Forum on Parliaments as Promoters of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. He also introduced the core group on "Contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review", consisting of Ecuador, Italy, Maldives, Morocco, the Philippines, Romania, and Spain, which has led work on this topic at the HRC, through successive HRC resolutions. In HRC resolution 35/29, the HRC requested that OHCHR in close cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), member states, UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders prepare a study on how to promote and enhance synergies between parliaments and the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review.

Ambassador Luis Gallegos summarized a joint statement by members of the core group at the HRC 39th session, in which members pointed out that they strongly believe that parliaments are essential human rights actors and play a crucial role in the promotion and protection of human rights, through the oversight of Governments' human rights action and policies, the implementation of recommendations, ratification of international treaties as well as the adoption of laws and the public budget. Members of the core group have also welcomed

OHCHR's Report (A/HRC/38/25), and commended the efforts made by OHCHR and the IPU to promote a constructive discussion on the recommendations resulting from that report through the organization of side events and workshops at the June 2018 and 2019 sessions of the Human Rights Council involving more than 100 members of parliaments from countries around the world.

Ambassador Luis Gallegos then said that, although good progress has been made, the side event was a timely opportunity to encourage States to look into the recommendations laid out by the OHCHR and the IPU in the report, in order to keep building on this important initiative, and more importantly, to consider what the General Assembly could do to promote parliamentary engagement with human rights and possibly endorse the draft principles annexed to the report A/HRC/38/25.

Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant-Secretary General for Human Rights reiterated the important role of parliaments in protecting and promoting human rights, noting that more than half of all UPR recommendations require some form of parliamentary action. He emphasized that parliaments should engage with international human rights mechanisms, including the reports and recommendations accepted at the HRC's Universal Periodic Review. He urged a greater role for parliaments in producing national human rights reports, taking action to anchor international human rights concerns within national frameworks. He noted that the Human Rights Council had, in resolution 35/29, requested OHCHR to prepare a report on how to promote and enhance synergies between parliaments and the work of the HRC and its UPR, which would be elaborated on by Mr. Gianni Magazzeni. He also stated OHCHR's belief that parliaments need to engage frequently with civil society organizations, and to defend them from attacks.

ASG Gilmour highlighted a previous report by the UN Secretary-General ([A/72/351](#), paras. 35-37), which states that while human rights are a crosscutting issue that should be taken into account by all parliamentary committees, the establishment of a parliamentary committee with an exclusive human rights mandate sends a strong political message and should be encouraged. The Secretary-General has also encouraged a more proactive engagement of parliamentarians in the work of international human rights mechanisms, including through the development of a set of principles and guidelines that would assist and guide them. ASG Gilmour pledged OHCHR's cooperation in the formation of parliamentary human rights committee, and closed by stating that he looked forward to increasing OHCHR's work on this topic.

H.E. Mr Ion Jinga, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Romania noted that the side event was significant as it presented the first opportunity for the General Assembly to discuss coordination on increasing parliaments' engagement with human rights. He underlined that protection of human rights is a key responsibility of parliaments, albeit one that was shared with the executive and the judiciary, all of which had important roles to play. The most effective way to secure human rights and end abuses is for there to be cooperation between parliaments, governments, judiciaries, human rights institutions and civil society. He encouraged the creation of parliamentary structures, committees and commissions to support human rights promotion and compliance, noting that in Romania, both the Chamber of Deputies and Senate have parliamentary human rights committees.

Mr. Nuno Vaultier Mathias, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal said that Portugal considers the issue of parliamentary engagement with human rights to be important and is engaged on it. Portugal established a parliamentary human rights committee in 2010, in order

to follow up on the recommendations received during its first Universal Periodic Review cycle in 2009. This parliamentary committee helps to define Portugal's nation position on various human rights issues, and to fulfil the obligations arising from international human rights instruments that Portugal has ratified. Portugal recognizes that many UPR recommendations require parliamentary intervention, and believes that parliaments have a role to play in contributing to the UPR mechanism and broader international human rights framework.

Mr. Louie Dane Merced, Principal Assistant in the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs, said that the Philippines recognizes the important role of parliaments in protecting human rights. Both chambers of the Philippines Congress have human rights committees, which work to prevent violations of human rights, and protect victims and their families, and are committed to advancing the rights of women and people with disabilities. The Philippines has been a member of the core group on contribution of parliaments to the work of the HRC, and supports parliamentary engagement with the Universal Periodic Review process.

Ms. Majda Moutchou, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Morocco to the UN noted that General Assembly resolution 65/123, adopted on 13 December 2010, recognized "the importance of the provision of continued parliamentary support to the work of the Human Rights Council" and acknowledged "the role and responsibility of national parliaments". She said that parliaments and parliamentarians play a crucial role in the promotion and protection of human rights, both at the national and international levels, and expanded on the Moroccan Parliament's role. Under the new Constitution of Morocco, the national human rights commission and government institutions report periodically to the parliament on the human rights situation, allowing parliamentarians to monitor the action of the government. The Moroccan parliament also approves all the treaties relating to individual or collective rights. In addition, the Moroccan parliament can, at any time, create commissions of inquiry to check, on the spot, any possible violation of human rights. Turning to recommendations, Morocco agrees with the importance of involving parliaments more effectively in the three phases of the UPR process, especially when preparing the national report, during its presentation, and at the implementation of UPR recommendations. Morocco also encourages the practice of including parliamentarians as members of national delegations to major United Nations meetings and events, in a more regular and systematic manner, as was highlighted by resolution 65/123 of the General Assembly.

2. Panel presentations

Ms. Sopio Kiladze MP, Chairperson, Georgian Parliament's Committee on Human Rights & Civil Integration said that the Georgian Parliament plays a crucial role in promoting and respecting human rights, and shared about the Georgian Parliament's activities through its legislative and oversight functions.

In terms of its legislative functions, Georgia adopted in 2017 new constitutional amendments that strengthened the role of its Parliament. The amendments have also completely reformed the chapter dedicated to human rights, declaring the dignity of persons as the first and absolute human right. The Committee on Human Rights & Civil Integration has played an important role in elaborating new legislation, such as the 2018 Law on Social Work initiated by the Committee and the recently adopted Code on the Rights of the Child. The Law on Social Work provides the legal basis for institutional strengthening of the social workers' profession in Georgia, which enables social workers to support vulnerable persons. The Code on the Rights of the Child is a fundamental reform creating state policy and concrete mechanisms to ensure

the well-being of every child in Georgia, and covers many fields, such as the eradication of child poverty, violence against and amongst children, education, and reform in civil and administrative justice. The main focus of the Code is on prevention and the strengthening of child protection at the municipal level. The Committee on Human Rights & Civil Integration worked on the Code for three years with all stakeholders, and the support of UNICEF.

In terms of its oversight functions, Georgia had a legislative gap and lacked the mechanisms to oversee the implementation of recommendations coming from the UN system such as the Universal Periodic Review and UN Treaty Bodies until 2016, when the Georgian Parliament amended its procedures to create an effective oversight mechanism. The amendments have empowered the Committee on Human Rights & Civil Integration to hold annual hearings on implementation of the UN Committees' Decisions and judgments by the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee has also held hearings on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, and will hold a hearing on Georgia's state report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights later in October 2019. After reviewing each of the aforementioned reports, the Committee analyses the challenges and success regarding human rights protection set out in the reports, and where necessary, issues appropriate recommendations addressing the relevant authorities. Thereafter, the Committee monitors implementation of the recommendations. The process of oversight is always very inclusive and transparent, with hearings transmitted live on TV and online, and actively involving the Ombudsman of Georgia, representatives of different government agencies, the judicial branch, NGOs, international organizations and experts. The Committee has also, for the first time in 2018, started the practice of committee hearings for "shadow reporting" by NGOs concerning Georgia's international human rights obligations.

Ms. Kiladze concluded by saying that the past few years have shown that the role of the Parliament has been increased significantly, including oversight of international human rights obligations, which ensures transparency, accountability and quality of human rights protection in Georgia. Georgia will continue to strengthen the role of Parliament, in order to achieve better protection of the well-being of individuals.

Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Chief of the UPR Branch, OHCHR spoke about the OHCHR report ([A/HRC/38/25](#)) on the contribution of parliaments to the work of the HRC and its UPR, which was requested by HRC resolution 35/29. The report identified existing good practices worldwide of parliamentary engagement with human rights and more specifically of the experience of parliamentary human rights committees.

The report was based on the analysis of responses received to a questionnaire sent by OHCHR to all member states, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and NGOs, and by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to its 178 member parliaments. The questionnaire asked specific questions not only concerning the UPR but also the relations of Parliaments with other human rights mechanisms, such as the treaty bodies and the special procedures mandate holders. A critical question concerned the existence of a dedicated human rights committee in Parliament, and specifically whether that committee had also an oversight role vis a vis the responsibilities of the Government with respect to international and regional human rights instruments. The responses to the questionnaire show overwhelming support from respondents with a parliamentary human rights committee, for the development by the UN, of international principles on parliaments and human rights.

Many respondents also responded positively to the question on the relevance of additional information tools or focused seminars on international human rights issues relevant to parliaments, organized in-country by IPU, OHCHR, or other United Nations entities. This demonstrates that there is a need, and a demand, for measures designed to: reduce the information and knowledge gap with respect to UN human rights mechanisms and procedures; and to further strengthen the oversight role of parliamentary human rights committees relating to executive branches' primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. OHCHR has responded by organizing regional meetings last year, in close cooperation with the Organisation de la Internationale Francophonie (OIF) and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), so as to share good practices of implementation on increasing parliamentary engagement with UPR, along with NHRIs and NGOs. OHCHR and OIF have also recently developed a joint project meant to train Members of Francophone Parliaments as they prepare for and undertake the 3rd cycle of the UPR.

Turning to the UPR process, which is halfway through its third cycle, the report covers the increasing emphasis on national implementation, and the role of parliaments in facilitating this. The continued universal and high-level participation in the UPR reflects Member States' political willingness and commitment to pursue human rights peer-to-peer dialogue on an equal footing and in a cooperative context, with a strong focus on implementation and follow-up to accepted recommendations. UPR recommendations have grown in number, and have become more focused, with about 200 recommendations typically being made to a country in the third cycle following interventions by, on average, 100 Member States. The human rights issues contained in UPR recommendations also reflect recommendations from treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders and taken together represent an X-ray of gaps in implementation at the country level, both in law and in practice, resulting from the ratification of international HR treaties or commitments made in previous cycle of the UPR. The report refers to the Secretary-General's statement in his first report to the GA, in 2017, that the UN will work to strengthen the relevance, precision and impact of the HRC's recommendations, including by providing better support to Member States in implementation, stronger collaboration with UN country teams and the establishment of national mechanisms for human rights reporting and follow-up to link the universal periodic review to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (A/72/1, para. 98).

The emphasis on implementation was also one of the key outcomes of the annual HRC high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming focussed on the UPR, held in February 2018. The panel identified the need for strong coordination of implementation efforts at the national level, through national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. The role of NHRIs and NGOs at the national and international levels was emphasized. Discussions focused on the need for stronger national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, and for a better alignment of development and human rights efforts, and thus on the complementarity between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of UPR recommendations.

Parliaments have an extremely important role to play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They will need to adopt or amend legislation, allocate a specific budget for implementation, exercise oversight over the executive branch for compliance and promote regional and international cooperation in support of implementation (see A/70/917, para. 7). By ensuring that those efforts are cross-linked to the recommendations of the international and regional human rights mechanisms, parliaments will contribute to better aligning national implementation efforts relating to human rights, development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

To facilitate parliamentary engagement with human rights, draft principles on Parliaments and Human Rights were developed and annexed to the report, which could serve as guidance to parliaments, taking into account national contexts and specific jurisdictions. The draft principles aim to guide parliaments in the setting up of parliamentary human rights committees, as well as in ensuring their effective functioning. They highlight the key functions of a parliamentary human rights committee as well as elaborate upon its composition and working methods. Some of the key functions described in the draft principles are: ratification or accession to international and regional human rights instruments; introducing and reviewing bills and existing legislation to ensure compatibility with international human rights obligations, and proposing amendments when necessary; and leading parliamentary oversight of the work of the Government in fulfilling its human rights obligations, as well as political commitments made in international and regional human rights mechanisms.

OHCHR also recommends that parliamentarians participate in the preparation of state reports for the UPR and treaty bodies, participate in the UPR Working Group, and play a leading role in the implementation and follow-up of recommendations made by UN human rights mechanisms and other regional mechanisms. In particular, parliaments have a fundamental role in establishing national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up (NMRFs) on human rights recommendations, and could play an active part in the work of such a mechanism.

Mr. Murray Hunt, Director, Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law shared his experience as the former Legal Adviser to the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights (2005-2017). He stressed the incredible importance of the role of parliament in legitimating human rights, as we have become over dependent on lawyers and legal institutions such as courts to uphold and defend human rights. At a time when institutions mandated to protect and promote human rights have come under attack and restrictions are being imposed on human rights defenders, parliaments and elected politicians need to defend these institutions and human rights defenders, and to legitimate human rights by taking ownership and breathing life into the country's human rights commitments.

Besides legitimating human rights, parliaments have an important role to play in implementing human rights obligations. The UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) has developed a number of good practices, while taking the approach that the protection and promotion human rights is a shared responsibility across parliament as well as the other branches of government, which can be achieved in partnership with other constitutional organizations such as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, and civil society organizations, in a collaborative enterprise. The JCHR undertakes a number of strands of activities, many of which are preventative, such as conducting legislative scrutiny of all bills to ensure their compatibility with the full range of the UK's human rights treaty obligations, identifying any possible human rights issues early and alerting the government to these issues. The JCHR raises questions to the government, analyses the government's responses, and holds multiple consultations with civil society before publishing reports to the whole of parliament explaining whether the legislation is compatible with human rights standards. The JCHR also plays an important role in oversight of the government's engagement with national, regional and international human rights mechanisms including the UPR and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Many other parliaments in different regions of the world have developed other good practices, which have been shared in various reports and international and regional forums, but it is important to have a set of draft principles

synthesizing these good practices, which can provide guidance for parliaments that want to increase their engagement with human rights.

Mr. Hunt shared that he recently worked with the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee as it conducted an [inquiry](#) on how to protect and promote human rights, after its mandate was expanded to include human rights. This presented an opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to use the draft principles to examine its own capacity to protect and promote human rights, and to make recommendations on what areas it needed to improve in. Following this examination, and extensive consultation with civil society, academic experts, NHRIs, citizens, governmental partners, and European, UN and IPU officials, the Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Committee issued a report in November 2018 entitled [Getting Rights Right](#), which identified practical, concrete steps that the Scottish Parliament needed to take in order to come closer to the guidance provided by the draft principles. This demonstrates the value of the draft principles in providing guidance to parliaments that want to increase their engagement with human rights. Should the draft principles command broad international commitment, this would accelerate similar efforts in the future.

3. Discussion

During the discussion following the panel presentations, civil society representatives raised several issues and questions, which the panellists and ASG Gilmour responded to.

(a) The relevance of the topic of increasing parliamentary engagement with human rights to developing countries, especially in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, where parliaments may be indistinguishable from governments/the executive branch, and the role of civil society is vital in ensuring that local human rights concerns are raised and addressed.

Mr. Gianni Magazzeni responded by explaining that human rights capacity building with parliaments in difficult contexts remains very important to increase local human rights protection, even in countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. He cited the example of OHCHR's work with the Iraqi parliament during conflict, which eventually led to the strengthening of Iraq's human rights protection system. He also explained that members of parliaments tend to focus on human rights violations in other countries and do not always have all of the knowledge they need to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law at home, which is why OHCHR has worked closely together with IPU and other partners like the Bingham Centre to inform and train parliamentarians, including on how parliaments should engage with NHRIs and civil society. In June 2019, OHCHR and IPU conducted a workshop for 80 MPs from 38 countries, and the reaction from many MPs was that they didn't know what UPR recommendations were accepted by their countries, even though the recommendations require parliamentary involvement. In order to provide better guidance to parliaments and facilitate change, it is an important priority to draft and endorse documents based on international best practices, such as the Belgrade Principles on the Relationship between NHRIs and Parliaments, which explains how parliaments should cooperate with NHRIs, and the Draft Principles on Parliaments and Human Rights.

Mr. Andrew Gilmour said that the point was well-taken that parliaments should engage with civil society to address local human rights concerns, and work together on the implementation of UPR recommendations. The parliamentary focal point of such engagement would be a parliamentary human rights committee, and so the recommendation to establish a parliamentary human rights committee is relevant to countries in many contexts, including sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Murray Hunt said that he started from the assumption that there may be limited relevance of the experience of mature parliaments such as the UK's parliament to other contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa. However, he had been pleasantly surprised by how many relevant initiatives were taking place in different parts of the world, and good practices that could be shared across different constitutional systems. For example, Uganda has a very interesting parliamentary human rights committee, which provides a forum in parliament for a wide spectrum of views to be shared and discussed on divisive and contentious issues. He agreed that more needed to be done to examine what to do in situations where governments dominate parliaments. The UK parliament has at times in history been an example of this, but is presently undergoing a "parliamentary renaissance" fuelled in part by the fact that the government lacks a strong majority in parliament, but also in part by parliamentarians developing a sense of independence and of their important constitutional role, particularly when it comes to ensuring respect for international commitments.

(b) How to address the challenge of a parliamentary human rights committee misinterpreting human rights regressively? Should there be a way to monitor the direction and interpretation of human rights by these committees, for example by the UPR mechanism or OHCHR?

Mr. Gianni Magazzeni said that this question demonstrated the importance of having guiding principles to provide a point of reference for parliaments around the world as to what is expected of a parliamentary human rights committee. For example, the Draft Principles state that the parliamentary human rights committee should have a mandate with clear terms of reference setting out its purpose and goals, and should compose of members of Parliament with human rights expertise, having due regard to the principle of pluralism (reflecting a variety of views), non-partisanship, respect for all human rights, and gender-balance. He also suggested that there had to be sequencing: firstly, reduce the information gap on the part of parliaments to educate parliamentarians about their role and responsibilities; secondly, provide guiding principles so that they can be applied; and then next, to see to what extent the international community can put in place a mechanism to measure the degree to which the principles are applied.

Mr. Murray Hunt said that the draft Principles are quite clear in recognizing the importance of establishment of parliamentary human rights committees as a body to promote human rights within parliaments, across all of parliaments' functions. While the human rights committee will play a leadership role, it is very important for human rights to be mainstreamed across parliament, and the purpose of a human rights committee is not to control discourse on human rights, but to facilitate and play a proactive role in mainstreaming of human rights across all sectors and issues.

(c) The issue of violence against women politicians, which begins with threats against women politicians that go unchecked. Because words do matter, should be a code of conduct, even within parliaments to ensure that words are more honest, transparent and beneficial to society rather than resulting in polarization of society?

Ms. Sopio Kiladze said with regret that violence against women was high in Georgia, and threats made against women in society at large as well as its parliament. Georgia has adopted a code of ethics for parliamentarians, which was a huge step forward, but has not prevented all threatening or bullying language. Because parliament includes members of the society, it reflects the problems that exist in society. Having a code of ethics is not enough, even though it may prevent some cases.

However, many women are speaking out loudly to say that they are victims of violence, and there is more awareness and transparency (release of statistics) of this problem. The Georgian

Parliament is cognizant of this problem, and had a recent lecture on it, and Georgia needs an increased focus on prevention, including work with perpetrators of violence meeting with social workers and counsellors to prevent repeated acts of violence.

4. Immediate follow-up statements after side event

In the Third Committee's general debates following the side event, Ecuador and Georgia made the following national statements building on the ideas discussed at the side event.

National Statement by Ecuador at General Debate on Human Rights Questions (agenda item 70):

“Bearing in mind that more than 50 percent of the recommendations issued by human rights mechanisms require action to be taken on the part of Parliaments, Ecuador has promoted at the level of the Human Rights Council, through resolution 35/29, greater cooperation between OHCHR, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Member States, UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to promote and improve synergies between parliaments and the work of the Human Rights Council. Ecuador also supports the draft principles on parliaments and human rights as a self-evaluation tool, which it hopes to see become a good practice.”

National Statement by Georgia at General Debate on the Report of the Human Rights Council (agenda item 65):

“Taking into account that more than 50% of human rights mechanisms' recommendations require parliamentary action, we believe that increased parliamentary engagement with human rights will contribute to enhancing the focus on implementation of the cycles of the UPR and the success of the SDGs. In this context I would like to welcome the draft principles on parliaments and human rights presented in OHCHR report (A/HRC/38/25). We are determined to further promote parliamentary engagement with human rights on national and international level.”