

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE
Président



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
President

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex / Genève
Suisse
Tél : (41 22) 919 41 50
Fax : (41 22) 919 41 60
E-mail: president@mail.ipu.org

National Assembly of Namibia
14c Love Street, Parliament Building
Private Bag 13323, Windhoek
Tel: 264-61-288 2504/6
Fax 264-61-231 626
E-mail: ipu_president@parliament.gov.na

Geneva, 24 February 2009

Dear Mr. Thomson,

I am pleased to respond to your enquiry relating to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

At a philosophical level, the IPU is founded on the notion that law has to substitute power in international relations. It is therefore only natural that throughout the organization's existence, members of parliament have been debating how best to regulate the use of arms and achieve disarmament.

Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament has been addressed by the IPU on many occasions. I draw your attention to the debates and resolutions of IPU conferences in 1990, 1994, 1995 and 1999. More recently, in October 2004, the IPU Assembly adopted a resolution which focused on measures that parliaments can take to address arms control and disarmament issues more generally. You can access all of these texts at our website www.ipu.org.

The resolutions demonstrate, I believe, a clear conviction that there is considerable scope for meaningful parliamentary action in support of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Parliaments can raise awareness of the issues at stake and mobilize political action. Informal parliamentary dialogue and exchange can lead to new initiatives and help overcome grid-locks at the level of formal diplomacy and negotiations. And finally, it is the parliaments that ratify the international treaties and agreements.

May I also refer you to a recent IPU report on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of Parliaments. The report provides a very good overview, I believe, of the many actions and initiatives that parliaments and parliamentarians can take to advance international agreements on major international issues. You will find a copy of the report at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/117/117-un-rel.htm>.

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Mr. Kelvin Thomson, MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament
CANBERRA
Australia

jsct@aph.gov.au

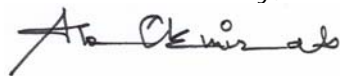
As you know, the 120th IPU Assembly will soon convene in Addis Ababa where members of parliament will debate the need to ensure the entry into force of the CTBT, and to advance nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Two co-rapporteurs, the Honorable Roger Price of Australia and the Honorable Jack Jacob Mwiimbu of Zambia, have been designated to facilitate the process. You will find all the provisional documents at our website at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/120agnd.htm>).

Although it is of course too soon to determine, I would expect that the resolution that will be finalized on that occasion will reflect a growing awareness in parliaments of the need to take action to overcome the current impasse in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament. Members of parliament are asking for better implementation of existing international commitments. They are also scrutinizing the budget and increasingly raise questions when new or increased budgetary allocations are proposed for military spending. A growing number of members of parliament openly question the wisdom of approving huge budget allocations for military spending at a time of global financial and economic crisis which make it difficult for many governments to finance economic and social development programs.

I also imagine that the resolution will draw inspiration from the five-point proposal for measures towards a nuclear weapons-free world which the United Nations Secretary-General launched late last year. It came up for discussion at the Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations and I refer you to the report which you will find at <http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/unga08.htm>),

I hope this is useful, and wish to thank you for engaging the IPU in this discussion on such an important global security issue. I wish you full success in your work.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theo Ben Gurirab', written in a cursive style.

Theo-Ben Gurirab
President of the
Inter-Parliamentary Union