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United Nations
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**Reference**: Submission of inputs for topics to be discussed during the Forum "Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law" by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

Dear Madame Prouvez,

I am honored to respond to your invitation of March 13, 2018 and submit on behalf of International IDEA our input to the conceptualization and shaping of the 2018 OHCHR Democracy Forum under the theme *"Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law".*

We propose for the Forum to shape an agenda for parliamentary action to rise to challenges posed by authoritarian leaderships, immigration, inequality, security and digital technologies.

## 1. Intersectionality of democracy, human rights and rule of law in International IDEA's work

Our understanding of democracy is rooted in the notion of popular control: a system in which the government is controlled by the people, and citizens are considered equals in the exercise of that control. Parliaments afford citizens that opportunity to constrain their rulers, realize their rights to demand explanations and if need be, impose sanctions. Parliaments are the bulwark of democratic accountability, embodying human rights and rule of law principles essential to pursue and attain sustainable development.

## 2. Parliaments and the protection of democracy, human rights and rule of law

Parliaments have responsibility for legislating towards the realization of human rights and rule of law; and put in place remedies in case of violations. Parliaments allocate resources and provides oversight for their use thereby enabling the public administration to realize human rights and rule of law obligations. The representative function on the other hand, should enable parliaments to shape and aggregate society views towards these three areas.

## 3. Parliaments rising to five challenges - possible topics for November 2018 Democracy Forum

Based on our 2017 assessment of democracy worldwide (*Global State of Democracy 2017, Exploring Democracy Resilience*), we identify five challenges in which parliaments play a central role:

i) *Parliaments and challenges to democratic pluralism:* there has been a rise in the appeal of authoritarian leaders who advocate visions that contradict fundamental values and rights, such as political pluralism or individual freedoms. Once in power, the undermine the level playing field for the opposition in parliaments, constraining parliaments' ability to exercise effective oversight of the executive. The Forum discussions could focus on how parliaments, through effective oversight, can act as defensive walls against the rise of hybrid or authoritarian impulses in several democracies.

ii) *Parliaments and immigration:* the number of people living outside their country has tripled over the last 40 years. The multiple challenges faced by migrants are complex, and usually pose difficult

dilemmas for policymakers. In many places, there is a perceived failure of governments to address problems ranging from pathways to citizenship, voting rights, social integration, working conditions of people. Meanwhile, anti-immigrant parties and negative reactions in native populations are on the rise. How can parliaments from host and origin countries cooperate to design effective policy frameworks for immigration and the associated human rights and rule of law challenges?

iii) *Parliaments and inequality:* the concentration of wealth has become especially acute over the last three decades, as the bottom five per cent of global income distribution made no progress at all. Inequality curtails young people's opportunities, and limits social mobility. Furthermore, it under-mines the legitimacy of political institutions. The SDGs are a powerful toolkit to overcome these challenges. How can parliaments effectively contribute to the attainment of SDGs, through em-boldened capacities and actions to tackle persisting inequalities, such as in the exercise of their budgetary and oversight mandates?

iv) *Parliaments and the oversight of security sector and digital media regulation:* Governments are increasingly taking human rights-averse actions in other areas that are rapidly changing due to technological innovation or geopolitical instability. The increasingly complex issue of regulation of digital media, and new understandings of privacy in the context of security threats are two exam-ples. As a result, limitations to the right to privacy and freedom of association have already been introduced in some countries and there is a risk more will increasingly take this route. How can parliaments be supported to navigate these complex issues, to be able to balance the imperative for national security and protecting human rights and rule of law?

We look forward to learning about the outcomes of this consultation. We remain at your disposal to further cooperation with regards to the upcoming forum.

Yours sincerely,

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