



**Global Partners**  
Governance

# **Global Partners Governance Fourth Regional Conference.**

**Political Parties and Parliamentary Blocs:  
Representation, Organisation and Delivery.**

**&**

**The Role of Parliaments in  
Conflict Resolution.**

**6th - 8th November 2014, Jordan.**

## Summary

Global Partners Governance held its fourth regional conference on the themes of “Political Parties and Parliamentary Blocs” and “The Role of Parliaments in Conflict Resolution” at the Dead Sea, Jordan on 6th – 8th November 2014. The event brought together politicians, parliamentarians and international experts from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Tunisia and the United Kingdom for a series of discussions and debates on these two topics of critical importance to the Middle East’s diverse yet interconnected transitions.

### Day One: Developing and Delivering Your Message: the Importance of Clear and Distinct Policies

Greg Power, Director of Global Partners Governance, welcomed all of the delegates to the event and stressed the importance of sharing experiences and learning from one another. The objective of such gatherings, he added, is not to lecture or dictate but rather to learn and discuss, and in the process try to come up with practical solutions to some of the challenges being faced across the region.

On behalf of the host country, Rami Wreikat, Secretary General of the Jordanian Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, welcomed all of the participants to the Dead Sea and outlined Jordan’s vision to strengthen its democratic system. The three pillars of this process are: firstly, political parties operating at a national level with a national programme, secondly, a professional and efficient government and thirdly an active and effective parliament. By working simultaneously on these three issues, Mr Wreikat said that the next stage in Jordan’s reform initiative would be to embed the concept of parliamentary government, in which the Prime Minister is chosen from parliament itself.

#### Session One: Managing Public Expectations and Developing a Manifesto

The opening session’s panellists, Nick Sigler, Former International Secretary of the UK Labour Party, Dr Samira Merai Friaa, former Member of the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly, and Dr Ahmed Touhami, Member of the Moroccan House of Representatives, considered how parties and blocs can manage and respond to the demanding expectations that voters have of them. They discussed how parties and blocs can engage with the public and develop policy manifestos, without making promises that cannot be delivered. Greg Power introduced the session with reference to the findings and insights in his publication for the IPU and UNDP, The Global Parliamentary Report. He made the point that although political parties emerged as a clear response to an identified problem, they are now often seen as a part of the problem in many parts of the world. Though the subject of scepticism and cynicism, opinion polls demonstrate that people from all regions still believe that political parties are key to representative democracy. As such, Mr Power argued that it is incumbent on political parties to adapt to new circumstances, and a key challenge for them is their organisation and management within parliament. Sharing some comparative examples from a host of countries that had undergone forms of transition, he identified three major themes: the importance of being clear with voters about what you stand for, the centrality of debate and even dissent within the party structure, and good systems of organisation. Though internal tensions often lead parties to split and fragment, he noted that robust systems of organisation can allow parties to handle and effectively manage their internal dynamics and become stronger and more coherent in the process.

Nick Sigler based his presentation on two facts of politics: that managing expectations affects every part of our life and that policy is the language of priorities. Drawing on this, he highlighted the dangers of allowing both the expectations gap – the difference between what is expected of politicians and what they can actually deliver – and the perceptions gap – the difference between what people hear about a particular issue and what the reality of the situation is – to get out of control. Allowing these mismatches to go unchecked undermines a political system and Mr Sigler presented a number of practical examples of how politics can be re-planted firmly in reality. He used the example of the ‘pledge card’ pioneered by the Labour Party in the 1990s as an example of a set of realistic promises that helped the party reach power and which were actually delivered on once in government.

Dr Samira Merai Friaa commented on what an opportune moment it was for this conference to be held, given Tunisia’s recent and successful parliamentary elections. On the issue of politicians’ relationship to voters, she noted that this depended on the nature of the electoral system, the constituency, the party and even the candidate, but she emphasised the

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**“Though the subject of scepticism, opinion polls demonstrate that people believe that political parties are key to representative democracy.”**

importance of basing political action on evidence and trustworthy data. Dr Friaa gave the example of her own party in Tunisia, which first carried out an extensive nationwide baseline survey to find out what people wanted at a local level. The results of this survey allowed them to identify a number of nationally-shared concerns and grievances, which in turn fed into the development of a national manifesto, based both on their convictions as a party and the empirical evidence. She ended her presentation with a consideration of developments in Tunisia, expressing her hope that the main parties would adopt a conciliatory principle to guide them in the critical period ahead.

Dr Ahmed Touhami shared the experience of what he referred to as the ‘Moroccan Exception’, in which stability and reform were the key pillars. He noted that although political pluralism had enshrined in the country since its first constitution, significant strides forward had been taken in the 2011 constitution, which puts political parties at the very heart of the political system. The Prime Minister must be appointed by the winner of general elections, which gives the government a clear mandate to govern. Furthermore, the concept of accountability of this government before parliament has been cemented as the Prime Minister is mandated to appear before MPs once a month for questioning.

The presentations sparked a number of questions and debates, on issues such as how people’s expectations differ radically during transitional periods, and are often closer to dreams, as well as on the importance of parties learning to work together since in many countries a single party will not be able to dominate the legislature through a clear majority. Though many people look to Tunisia as the ‘model’ Dr Samira Merai Friaa acknowledged that parties in her country are still in the process of formation and consolidation and that many other challenges remain.

## **Session Two: Policy Processes: Internal Organisation and Decision-Making Structures**

The panellists in the second session, Dr Saleh Al-Hasnawi, Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, Sir Nick Harvey, Member of the UK House of Commons, and Ahmed Fawzy, Secretary General of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, looked at policy development processes within their political parties and blocs in more detail, discussing how internal decision-making structures can be established to feed into the development of a policy programme.

More than ten years after the fall of the former regime, Dr Saleh Al-Hasnawi surveyed the political landscape in Iraq, noting tensions between the party interest and the national interest across the country. He revealed the complexities of the situation within the parliament, in which parties form parts of coalitions which in turn seek to form broader alliances, but much of this work is hampered because a clear political parties law has yet to be approved. Though highlighting the tensions between party interest, group interest and national interest, Dr Al-Hasnawi did not discount the possibility of transcending the former without totally abandoning it, and stressed the importance of clear and respected internal decision making structures that are democratic.

Sir Nick Harvey commenced his presentation acknowledging that there will always be an electoral angle to all party-political work, but that there must be a more long term strategy to provide a vision and to plot the path ahead. In terms of policy formulation, realism and priorities are the two most important factors, and Sir Nick recommended that all policy options be costed and feasibility tested. He also cautioned against an over-reliance on experts, noting that they should inform policy, but that politicians who can take a wider view must set it. Just as parties should draw on a range of expertise, Sir Nick also encouraged the participants to reach out to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, from donors to volunteers and civil society to academia but to maintain a clear sense of leadership within a party. Drawing on his experience in a coalition government, he ended with an aphorism he deemed apposite for the occasion: “the art of compromise is an essential part of the science of politics”.

Despite being the Secretary General of one of Egypt’s newest and fastest-growing political parties, Ahmed Fawzi shared with the delegates his belief that decades of suppressed political activity has meant that most parties in Egypt are better described as proto-parties, owing to the frequency of shifting allegiances and fragmentation. He noted that many people in Egypt conflate the notion of a political party with that of either a charity or a protest movement and, to add insult to injury, mistakes made since the events of 2011 have undermined the credibility of political parties across the board. Nonetheless, Mr Fawzi remained optimistic and stressed his belief that political parties must organise themselves democratically in order to regain the trust of the people.

**“The art of compromise is an essential part of the science of politics.”**

A number of questions were fielded, on issues ranging from the role of national political parties in heterogeneous societies, the concept of citizenship and the engaged citizen, and whether the presence of too many political parties represented a fundamental problem. The delegates were then split into two groups to discuss some of the themes that emerged from the day's sessions before reporting their conclusions back to the plenary.

## Day Two: Working Effectively in Parliament

### Session One: Negotiation and Compromise: Cross-Party Relationships and Coalitions

Andrew Feinstein, former Member of the South African Parliament for the African National Congress, Najeeba Ibrahim, Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, and Dr Amr El-Shobaki, former Member of the Egyptian Parliament and Coordinator of the New Wafd Coalition, were the panellists for the first session of day two, which discussed the importance of caucusing, setting out party 'red lines' and processes of negotiation between different parties that work in the interest of the people.

Andrew Feinstein asked the delegates to consider how South Africa, in which divisions were so deeply rooted and institutionalised, has managed to become an emerging and successful democracy, in spite of all the challenges it still faces. His answer placed negotiation and compromise at the centre of progress, with each side having to make significant concessions on the most sensitive issues from amnesty laws to the day-to-day troubles of running the state. Inside parliament, it was critical that those chosen as negotiators enjoyed the trust of all elements within their own party but also of their opposite numbers, and the only way to ensure that was through internal democratic practices. In that way, Mr Feinstein believed that compromises were not seen as signs of weakness, but rather demonstrated a willingness to act in the national interest, provided those compromises fit within the party's core values.

Najeeba Ibrahim broadened the discussion to include the importance of negotiations between parliament and government, since a government that insists on dragging its feet will not implement the laws the legislature passes. Drawing on the Iraqi experience of the past ten years, Ms Ibrahim pointed to significant issues that had been resolved when parties sat together and reached mutually-acceptable solutions, yet she also acknowledged that a number of outstanding conflicts have been left unresolved due to a lack of agreement. She ended on a positive note, however, stressing that the recent tragic events in Iraq have served to strengthen national unity and that the main parties and blocs are ready to seriously sit together and resolve some of the most significant challenges that face the country.

Drawing on Andrew Feinstein's presentation, Dr Amr El-Shobaki, commented that many of the conciliatory principles from the South African experience are not present in the countries of the 'Arab Spring'. Often, he said, such entrenched positions are adopted that there is no recognition of the right of others to participate in the political process, which only promotes an exclusivist approach typified by the passing of laws across the region aimed at politically isolating certain groups or constituencies. Dr El-Shobaki noted that these attitudes actually impede the healthy development of political parties, and keep them 'identity-based' rather than 'platform-based'. He concluded with a consideration of the Egyptian political scene, especially the debates around the controversial electoral law and how a lack of genuine cross-party negotiations has impeded democratic development since 2011.

Questions raised after this session focussed on points of comparison and contrast with the South African transition, especially on acceptance of regimes of the need to change. Some participants felt a Pact of Honour laid out early on between the principal actors was a necessary component, but others believed that fluid political structures didn't allow for promises to be made and kept.

### Session Two: Delivering in Parliament: Organisation, Strategies and Resources

Rt Hon Alistair Burt, Member of the British House of Commons, Dr Abdellatif Berroho, Member of the Moroccan House of Representatives, and Dr Mustafa Yaghi, Member of the Jordanian House of Representatives, formed the panel for the second session. The speakers focussed on the requirements for the effective organisation of parties or blocs in parliament and the important role they play in a well-functioning parliament.

Alistair Burt described for the participants the central factors for the success of a parliament as an institution, based on his many years in the executive and the legislature, underlining the importance of trust and confidence. Building trust between parliament and government

**“Exclusivist approaches impede the healthy development of political parties, and keep them ‘identity-based’ rather than ‘platform-based’.”**

takes time, as does restoring it, yet destroying it can be done in an instant. Mr Burt also pointed to the difficult process of striking the right balance within each political party or bloc, between an overbearing top-down approach and a lack of any clear party direction. He finished by warning all parliamentarians present against becoming merely a conduit for others' opinions, stressing that Members are elected to use their judgement, and that is how they will need to justify their actions and be held accountable.

Dr Abdellatif Berroho examined the history of political parties in Morocco since 1958, noting that party-political activity was never abolished despite the existence of parties that opposed the political system. As political parties have been empowered, through constitutional amendments and within the parliament itself, the responsibilities placed on governing and opposition parties too have increased, leading to heightened pressure to perform and deliver. Dr Berroho commented that parties have been given the resources and mechanisms to conduct effective oversight in parliament, which has led to an overall improvement in how it carries out its work.

Dr Mustafa Yaghi informed the delegates of his hope that the forthcoming elections in Jordan would be fought on a party-political basis, with clear and coherent policies being laid out offering voters a choice of government programmes. Yet he remained concerned that not enough progress was being made towards this end. Dr Yaghi expressed his worry that too many citizens do not show an interest in the legislative and oversight role of the parliament, but rather expect it to play a local service delivery role. He asked his colleagues from other countries to share their experiences on dealing with requests from constituents that bear no relation to their role as MPs, since he was sure that the problem was not unique to Jordan. Dr Yaghi traced the positive and empowering effects of recent constitutional change on parliament, but said that he aspired for more, especially in the form of financial independence for the legislature.

A number of questions were asked of the panellists, which teased out some of the key differences between party and bloc formation in different countries, but which also underlined the importance of properly channelling resources available. Participants were then split into groups to discuss more informally some of the lessons learned over the previous two days. The conclusions of these discussions were reported back to the plenary.

### **Day Three: The Role of Parliaments in Conflict Resolution**

The theme for the third and final day of the conference was the central role that parliaments can play during turbulent transitional periods and in the process of reaching political settlements to protracted conflicts.

#### **Session One: Insights from Northern Ireland, South Africa, Iraq and Libya**

The panellists for the first session were Mitchel McLaughlin and Paul Givan, Principal Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Justice Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively, Andrew Feinstein, former Member of the South African Parliament for the African National Congress, Yonadam Kanna, Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, and Salah Galma, Member of the Libyan House of Representatives.

Mitchel McLaughlin and Paul Givan shared their moving experiences from both sides of the political divide in Northern Ireland, reliving the long and difficult process of overcoming deep divisions to assert the principle of mutual recognition and respect of the will of the people. Both acknowledged that historical scars have yet to heal between the two communities, but when representatives from both sides agreed that their grievances could not be addressed in London or Dublin, it became apparent that they would have to work together towards an acceptable solution crafted in Belfast. McLaughlin and Givan explained how the parliament in Northern Ireland is run in such a way as to promote dialogue and understanding between the two communities. The moderator of the session, Rt Hon Alistair Burt, remarked at the end just how momentous it was that he was seated between representatives of two sides to a conflict that simply refused to speak to each other for a long period of time.

The role of parliament as a forum for bringing together former enemies as part of the democratic process was the central theme of Andrew Feinstein's talk; he began by recalling his memory of watching an ANC colleague of his sitting opposite her former torturer, and being struck by how she was able to put that traumatic experience to one side in the interest of the country. Though he underlined the necessity for parliament as an institution to keep functioning despite difficult circumstances, Mr Feinstein elaborated on his anecdote to stress the importance of individual characters. He recalled a piece of advice the late Nelson

***"If you want to make peace with your enemy, then you must work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."***

**Nelson Mandela**

Mandela had given to all South Africans: ‘If you want to make peace with your enemy, then you must work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner’.

Yonadam Kanna shared his experiences of the Iraqi transition from the fall of the regime, through the constitutional drafting process and the role of the parliament thereafter. He gave special consideration to the amendments that he thought necessary to make to the constitution as well as spelling out the articles of that constitution that have yet to be implemented. Beyond the text, however, he stated that as long as Iraqis are not unified amongst themselves, they will continue to be exploited from the outside and by extremist groups from within.

The Libyan delegation nominated Salah Galma to speak on their behalf, and after explaining the history of the Libyan uprising he brought the delegates up to date on recent political developments in Libya where the legitimacy of the House of Representatives had been called into question. Mr Galma insisted that a parliament needed to be at the core of the political transition and that a comprehensive national dialogue process had to be initiated which did not seek to exclude anyone. In that way, he concluded, the uprising would lead to the building of strong institutions that could serve the people.

The panellists’ interventions inspired a number of questions and comments from the floor on a whole range of issues. The discussions that ensued were neatly summed up by one delegate who said three key themes were clear: that conciliation takes time with many failures before it works, that secret and behind-the-scenes talks between parties too hostile to one another to talk publicly are very important, and that if unifying principles that transcend parochial interests can be identified then the likelihood of success would be increased.

### Session Two: Building Parliament’s Role in Managing the Transition

Sanaa Mersni, former Member of the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly and recently elected candidate in the parliamentary elections, Dr Alaa Makki, Former Member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, and Dr Saad El-Hashimi, Member of the Libyan House of Representatives, formed the panel for the final session of the conference, which focussed on the challenges of attaining consensus and reaching political settlements.

Though the word that has come to characterise the Tunisian transition – tawafuq or consensus – often seems like an idealistic aspiration, Sanaa Mersni explained it required significant concessions and compromises in a political and security climate that was much more tense than is often thought. She highlighted three key issues that required all parties and players involved to accept the consensus principle, namely the processes of drafting the constitution, forming the government and competing in elections. During all three, public pressure and a respect of the democratic process enabled the transition to stay on track, despite events such as the assassination of two prominent politicians that could easily have derailed it.

Dr Alaa Makki shared with the delegates all the challenges that faced the Iraqi parliament between 2005 and the present day but refused to accept them as a justification for inaction. In his capacity as Chair, then Deputy Chair, of the Education Committee and then as the Chair of the Code of Conduct Committee, Dr Makki detailed how he continuously strove to generate consensus amongst members from different and often opposing parties and factions in order to give his committees a unified voice and achieve tangible results.

Dr Saad El-Hashimi thanked all of the participants and presenters at the conference for their contributions, all of which he said were of particular interest to the Libyans present. He outlined his view on the turbulent history of parliament since 2011 as well as some scenarios for how events could develop in his own country. Though matters remained fluid and unpredictable, he stressed the importance of trying to bring conflicting parties together to resolve their disputes peacefully.

Immediately after the session, delegates were split into two thematic groups to discuss building public confidence in parliament and parliament’s role in negotiations, after which nominated rapporteurs reported back to the plenary. At the end of proceedings, Greg Power, Director of Global Partners Governance, thanked all present once again for their participation and expressed his hope that delegates would continue to engage with one another on issues that will continue to affect the whole region in the period ahead.

“Consensus often seems like an idealistic aspiration but requires significant concessions and compromises.”