

# Examination of the Status and Practical Measures of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Recent Years (2012–2022) from the Perspective of Experts

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The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, within the framework of legal cooperation in the development of human rights, has defined for itself missions such as safeguarding parliamentary immunity and ensuring the freedom of action of parliamentarians. The research question is: To what extent has this Committee been able to undertake effective practical measures in support of the parliamentarians of member countries, and what status has it achieved as a result? We sought answers through a questionnaire administered to experts and analyzed the responses using thematic analysis with the assistance of MAXQDA software. After analyzing the statements, we were able to categorize them under themes such as institutionalization of human rights, global convergence, parliamentary diplomacy, effective rule of law, gender equality, transparency, and weakness in compelling states to cooperate. These categories reflect actions that, from the viewpoint of experts, have been evaluated as factors and indicators of the Committee's enhanced status in recent years (2012–2022). The category concerning the weakness in compelling states to cooperate reflects expert criticism of the Committee's performance. In summary, while the Committee has been able to enhance its status in recent years through appropriate and supportive actions, it still suffers from a fundamental weakness in enforcing state cooperation.

**Keywords:** *Inter-Parliamentary Union, Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, human rights of parliamentarians, parliamentary diplomacy*

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## 1. Introduction

Delmas-Marty argues that the very concept of “globalization” originates from human rights (Delmas-Marty, 2003). The “development of international law,” its expansion into diverse and multifaceted domains, the absence of strong centralized institutions, the increasing specialization of international law, the differentiated structure of legal norms, the coexistence of parallel and competing rules,

the widening scope of international law, and the emergence of various regimes of secondary rules all contribute to its pluralization and shape the policy processes as well as the political decisions and actions taken within this field.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is an inter-parliamentary institution founded in 1889 by the Frenchman Frédéric Passy and the Englishman Randal Cremer. It was the first permanent institution



established for multilateral political negotiations. Initially limited to parliamentarians, it later evolved into an international organization for the parliaments of various states. The national parliaments of 178 countries—most recently Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vanuatu, whose memberships were granted during the 137th Assembly—are members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and 12 regional parliamentary assemblies hold associate status. The IPU also has permanent observer status at the United Nations General Assembly. In this context, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the IPU serves as the only mechanism dedicated to defending parliamentarians against threats, violations, and acts of violence (IPU, 2024d).

The Inter-Parliamentary Union—particularly its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians—is composed of representatives from various geographical regions and operates in alignment with other international human rights bodies (including the United Nations). In pursuing legal cooperation to promote human rights, the Committee has defined several missions for itself and placed multiple initiatives on its agenda. Monitoring the working conditions and freedoms of parliamentarians worldwide, as well as assessing the extent to which governments and influential bodies respect parliamentary immunity and the independence of parliamentary action, constitute among its core missions (IPU, 2024b). The Committee pursues these missions through two main mechanisms: first, by observing and supervising parliaments; second, by providing an accessible and straightforward complaint mechanism for parliamentarians from member states. When the Committee identifies or receives reports of violations against one or more parliamentarians, it follows various pathways, including providing legal consultation, conducting monitoring and fact-finding missions, engaging with authorities of the concerned state, and ensuring transparency, all in an effort to restore the rights of the complainant parliamentarian (IPU, 2024a).

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is fundamentally tasked with promoting human rights, safeguarding the rights of parliamentarians worldwide, and—through mechanisms such as fact-finding missions and reporting to the IPU and competent bodies—strengthening and institutionalizing human rights while

ensuring the security and independence of parliamentarians. It is under such protective frameworks that parliamentarians can perform their representative duties freely and independently, without fear of pressure groups or even governments, and can effectively fulfill their mandate and defend the rights of their constituents. Yet, there remain groups and governments that exert pressure on parliamentarians and attempt to silence dissenting and critical voices. According to the IPU, on the eve of Human Rights Day in 2022, a total of 739 parliamentarians from 44 countries reported violations of their fundamental rights to the Committee. Notably, this figure was 673 cases in 2021, representing nearly a 10% increase. The number of registered complaints by parliamentarians in the Middle East rose by 31% from 2014 to 2021. In 2022, of the 739 complaints, 219 pertained to the Middle East and North Africa. A similar trend is visible regarding violations against female parliamentarians: complaints rose from 37 in 2014 to 137 in 2022—an almost fourfold increase (Ipu, 2023). This growing number of violations and complaints underscores the necessity of evaluating the Committee's role and status.

Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the status and practical measures of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians from the perspective of experts, as well as to assess expert views on whether the Committee's status has improved or weakened in recent years (2012–2022).

## 2. Domestic Studies

Regarding the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the only available domestic sources consist of reports produced by the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, among which the most recent include the following:

Delavarpour Aghdam and Ghasempour (2023), in a report titled *"The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): Opportunities, Obstacles, and Requirements for the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran,"* assessed the effectiveness of Iran's parliamentary diplomacy and the extent of its influence in regional, continental, transregional, and global parliamentary assemblies (Delavarpour Aghdam & Ghasempour, 2023). The report also examined the structure of the IPU, the position of the Iranian Parliament within the organization and its standing committees, and Iran's current status in the IPU.

Delavarpour Aghdam (2022), in a report titled *“Parliamentary Diplomacy 7: The OIC Parliamentary Union and Diplomatic Requirements of the Islamic Consultative Assembly,”* analyzed the significance of the OIC Parliamentary Union within the strategic framework of the Iranian Parliament (Delavarpour Aghdam, 2022). Sa’eid (2015), in a report titled *“Regional, Trans-regional, and Global Inter-Parliamentary Organizations (1): The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament,”* described the organizational structure of the IPU and its regional and transregional branches (Sa’eid, 2015).

Arfaei (1995), in an article titled *“Extra-Parliamentary Consultations: The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Charter,”* published in *Majlis va Pazhoohesh*, Issue 16, referred to the role of the IPU and its charter in supporting environmental protection and cooperation with the United Nations in this field (Arfaei, 1995).

As described above, a few domestic studies have addressed the IPU; however, they are not necessarily academic research works, and most focus on the general structure of the Union rather than the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. They bear almost no direct relevance to the Committee itself.

### 3. Foreign Studies

A review of the literature indicates that no scientific and independent study specifically examining the status of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians—particularly its decisions and legal implications—has been conducted so far. Most existing sources simply reiterate official documentation introducing the Committee and outlining its fundamental rules. The first such source is a document that addresses the principles and rules governing the Committee (IPU, 2024c). This 27-page document elaborates on the Committee’s procedures and includes the complaint form used by petitioners, also available online on the official IPU website. Other documents follow the same pattern, focusing primarily on introducing the Committee and the complaint process.

One of the most important texts is a book titled *“Status and Rules,”* which examines the overall position of the Inter-Parliamentary Union as well as its governing rules (IPU, 2024a). The book includes chapters on the status of the IPU, the statutes and regulations of the Union, the rules of the Governing Council, the rules of the Executive

Committee, the bylaws of the Standing Committees, the rules of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the regulations of the Office of Women MPs, the rules and working methods of the Forum of Young MPs, the procedures of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the regulations of the IPU Secretariat, financial regulations, and finally, the rights and responsibilities of observers in IPU sessions.

As stated above, a limited number of English-language foreign studies on the IPU exist. Although informative, they focus primarily on general rules, structures, and procedures of the Union and do not offer in-depth analysis of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Consequently, the existing domestic and foreign literature lacks any academic research that specifically examines the Committee and its role.

### 4. Research Method

The approach of this study is qualitative. Given the objectives and research questions, as well as the nature of the collected data, thematic analysis was selected as the most suitable method.

The statistical population of this study consists of parliamentarians and experts who, in some capacity, are closely familiar with the structure, mission, objectives, duties, and functions of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Sampling was conducted using a purposeful and criterion-based approach by identifying knowledgeable individuals and establishing communication with them—either virtually or in person—and continued until the researcher reached a level of theoretical saturation in the responses. Ultimately, 16 experts participated in this study.

In the first stage, internet search tools and note extraction were used. In the second stage, since the aim was to examine the views of experts who have had some level of interaction with the IPU and its committees, the research instrument consisted of a qualitative questionnaire completed with the cooperation of the participants.

Through questionnaires, it is possible to assess the knowledge, interests, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals or organizations, to understand their previous experiences, and to gain awareness of their current actions. In this study, an open-ended questionnaire was used for collecting field data, enabling the qualitative gathering of information.

Given the method of data collection and the qualitative nature of the data, MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software was used.

In this study, four criteria were considered for evaluating scientific rigor in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria, along with their implementation strategies, are presented below.

- **Credibility:** prolonged engagement and continuous observation; peer checking by research colleagues and advisory group; participant review; triangulation techniques
- **Transferability:** detailed description of the research environment and participants
- **Dependability:** auditing, researcher documentation of data, methods, and decisions; researcher reflexivity
- **Confirmability:** obtaining model confirmation from experts and participants

In this study, the first stage involved collecting information on the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians through library-based research. The documentary section was organized by examining documents and records obtained directly from IPU archives. Subsequently, through fieldwork and the use of an open-ended questionnaire, the status of the Committee during the years 2012–2022 was analyzed from the perspective of experts.

## 5. Findings

The coding process in this study was conducted using MAXQDA 2020. Accordingly, the data collected from the interviews were first reviewed by the researcher, unified, and converted into textual documents. Then, based on coding principles and in line with the research objectives and existing literature, a code was assigned in the software for each quotation. It should be noted that similar concepts were assigned similar codes. After the coding steps were completed, the final outcome was a model that explains the status of the Committee, in the view of experts, and the issues related to its decisions within the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The qualitative analysis method used in this research was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a multi-stage

process that was carried out and presented as follows: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes and coding, searching for and identifying themes, developing the theme network and model, and analyzing the theme network.

### Step 1 and Step 2: Familiarization with the Data and Generating Initial Codes Using MAXQDA

In this stage, the interview texts were first reviewed, and then the sentences relevant to the topic were selected. Finally, an initial list of ideas and noteworthy points in the data was prepared. Initial codes were identified, and the interviews were initially coded in the software. Sections of the interview text related to the research topic were identified, and a corresponding code was created.

### Step 3: Searching for and Identifying Themes

At this stage, the initial codes extracted from the interviews were placed into a table according to their thematic relevance. These codes served as semantic and conceptual indicators in the analysis of the interviews, and as facilitators for subsequent interpretation and analysis.

In the first stage of coding, 382 codes were generated. In the next stage, some codes that were less relevant to the research topic were removed, while others were merged or reorganized. Some codes were also modified or renamed based on expert consultation. After refinement and review, the initial codes were transformed into the final codes used in this study, which are presented in the following step.

### Step 4: Identifying Final Concepts and Themes, and Developing the Theme Network and Research Model

At this stage, the existence and validity of the themes and categories were established—meaning that it was determined which themes should remain in the network and which should be removed. A set of indicators was identified and examined, and irrelevant or repetitive codes were removed. The finalized themes and categories formed the core structure of the research model. These themes and categories are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

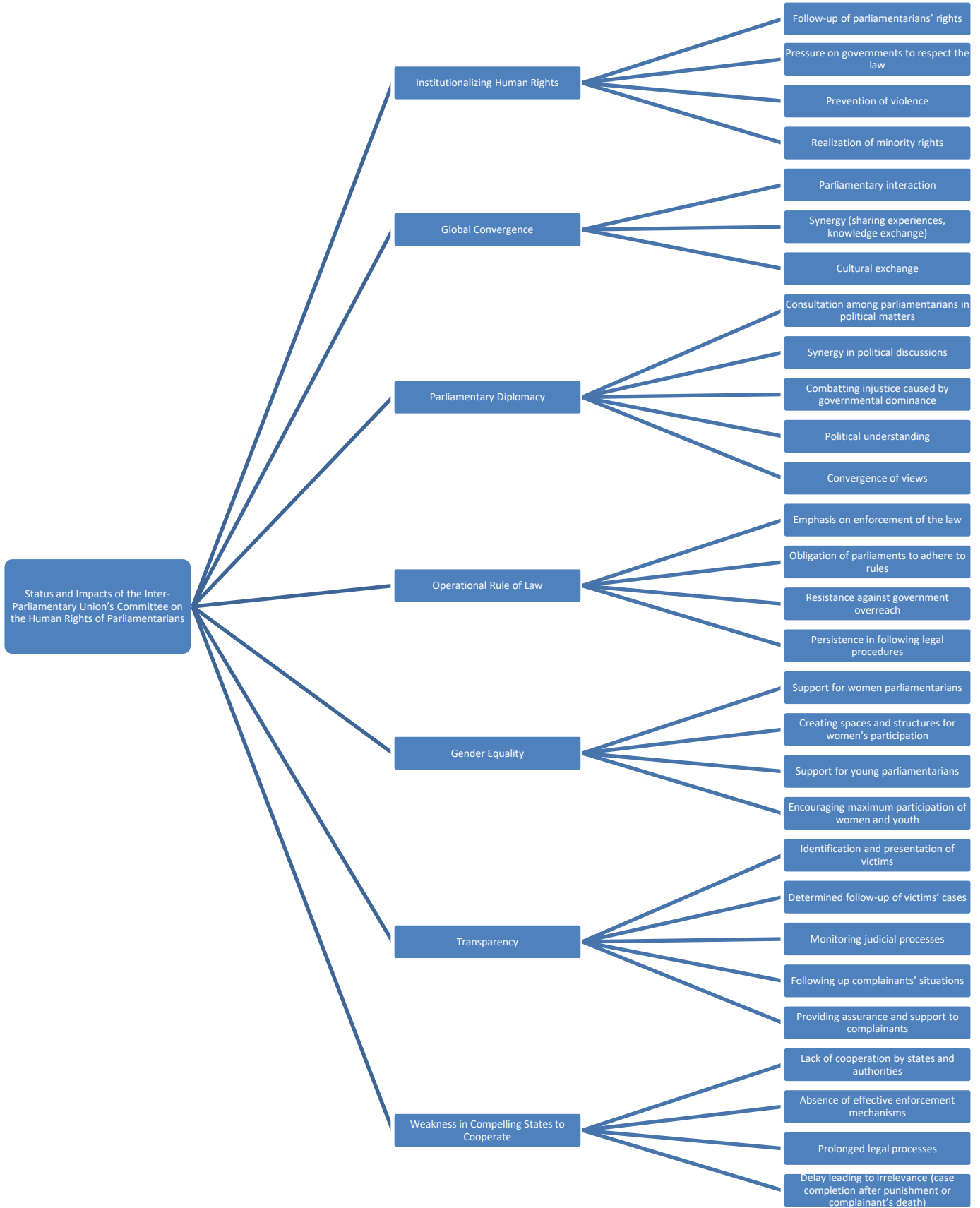
*Final Themes and Categories*

Source Code	Initial Codes	Concepts	Categories
Int 2	Encouragement and effectiveness of follow-up	Follow-up of parliamentarians' rights	Institutionalizing human rights
Int 14	Support and reassurance for parliamentarians		
Int 4	Reducing the weakening of parliamentarians' rights		
Int 8	Significant impact		
Int 3	Pressure for enforcing the law	Pressure on governments to respect the law	
Int 11	Determination in addressing violations of laws		
Int 16	Creating a sense of oversight in cases of legal violations		
Int 9	Providing reassurance to parliamentarians under pressure		
Int 2	Reducing violent pressure	Prevention of violence	
Int 5	Relief from governmental pressures		
Int 14	Government restraint in violence due to the Committee's follow-up		
Int 7	Creating hope among minority parliamentarians	Realization of minority rights	
Int 15	Continuous follow-up of minority parliamentarians' rights		
Int 13	Reducing pressure on minority parliamentarians		
Int 6	Access to minority parliamentarians' rights		
Int 13	Development of knowledge through parliamentary interaction	Parliamentary interaction	Global convergence
Int 8	Creating a shared discourse in assemblies		
Int 10	Creating convergence through organized events		
Int 3	Using parliamentarians' experiences	Synergy	
Int 4	Producing implicit knowledge		
Int 12	Increasing knowledge through sharing experiences		
Int 9	Emphasizing knowledge production in human rights		
Int 5	Understanding human rights from a cultural perspective	Cultural exchange	
Int 12	Recognizing different cultural dimensions of human rights		
Int 10	Deep understanding of cultural differences		
Int 3	Political consultation through parliamentary interaction	Consultation in political matters	Parliamentary diplomacy
Int 12	Synergy in political discussions		
Int 16	Combatting injustice caused by government dominance		
Int 10	Contributing to shared political understanding	Political understanding	
Int 11	Achieving intersubjective political experience		
Int 4	Creating shared perspectives on human rights issues	Convergence of views	
Int 1	Establishing shared ground through exchange of opinions		

Int 5	Establishing common intellectual foundations for human rights and development		
Int 1	Follow-up on legal violations	Emphasis on rule enforcement	Operational rule of law
Int 15	Obligating adherence to rules for parliaments		
Int 9	Optimism about the future due to resistance against government pressure	Resistance to government overreach	
Int 11	Repeated follow-ups despite government pressure		
Int 16	Persistence in adhering to the law while addressing complaints		
Int 3	Emphasis on equal opportunities for women	Support for women parliamentarians	Gender equality
Int 16	Establishing a separate forum for women		
Int 4	Creating conditions for women's participation		
Int 7	Establishing a separate forum for youth	Support for young parliamentarians	
Int 11	Creating suitable grounds for youth participation and growth		
Int 2	Continuous monitoring of women's and youth's conditions	Encouraging maximum participation of women and youth	
Int 5	Creating appropriate conditions for improving the situation of women and youth		
Int 14	Establishing specialized forums for women and youth		
Int 6	Maximum support for victims	Identification and presentation of victims	Transparency
Int 11	Assigning victim support as a primary objective		
Int 7	Determination in following up victims' cases		
Int 9	Identifying cases and following them accurately	Monitoring judicial processes	
Int 15	Determination in following up cases despite governmental challenges		
Int 5	Providing access to international attorneys	Following up complainants' situations	
Int 1	Assurance for parliamentarians regarding complaint follow-ups		
Int 8	Encouragement received from the Committee in special cases		
Int 16	If a country or authority is unwilling, it can refuse to provide information	Lack of state cooperation in cases	Weakness in compelling states to cooperate
Int 3	If a country refuses to cooperate, no effective mechanism exists		
Int 5	Withholding information prolongs the process	Prolonged procedures	
Int 6	Obtaining information from national authorities is time-consuming		
Int 4	Some cases become so prolonged that the complainant passes away	Remedy after death	
Int 11	Some cases are resolved only after the complainant has completed a sentence and been released		

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Research



## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine the status of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. The central hypothesis was that, based on available evidence and preliminary observations, as well as a review of the Committee's reports, it appears that this Committee has been able to strengthen its position in the field of parliamentary human rights and increase expert attention to its work in recent years (2012–2022). Based on the collected data and subsequent analyses, participants generally viewed the Committee's status as effective and evaluated its actions in recent years as successful in enhancing this position, although their criticisms resulted in the emergence of a significant and influential category that will be crucial for the Committee's future.

The most important categories extracted from experts' statements regarding the Committee's activities and measures include: institutionalizing human rights, global convergence, parliamentary diplomacy, operational rule of law, gender equality, transparency, and finally, the weakness in compelling states to cooperate. As shown in the research model, the participating experts believe that the Committee has performed successfully in these areas, and based on this assessment, they argue that the Committee's status has improved over the past decade, although the criticism raised against the Committee remains vital and impactful.

According to the research data and analyses conducted in MAXQDA, institutionalizing human rights has been one of the most significant actions pursued by the Committee in recent years and has been implemented to a reasonably acceptable degree. Participating experts believe that the Committee, through actions such as following up on the rights of parliamentarians, exerting pressure on governments to respect the law, preventing violence, and defending the rights of minorities—whose rights are often neglected globally—has taken effective steps toward institutionalizing human rights. For example, some participants noted that “whenever a parliamentarian needs the Committee's support, the Committee steps in,” or that “one of the areas in which this Committee has a significant impact is securing the rights of groups of parliamentarians who belong to

political or ideological minorities within a national parliament.”

From the experts' perspective, another factor that has contributed to the Committee's enhanced status in recent years is its role in facilitating global convergence. Efforts toward parliamentary interaction, synergy between parliamentarians from different countries, and cultural exchange have been categorized under global convergence. As one participant stated, “I consider parliamentary interaction one of the strengths of this Committee. Through such exchanges, parliaments can strengthen and expand their knowledge in various fields, especially in the area of human rights.” Another participant observed, “Understanding diverse cultures and their approaches to political issues has been fascinating for me. The cultural exchange within this Committee has made me reflect deeply on how human rights can also be understood as a cultural concept.”

Experts also highlighted parliamentary diplomacy as an area in which the Committee's recent activities have strengthened its position. Concepts such as political consultation among parliamentarians, political understanding, and convergence of political views were frequently mentioned. One participant explained, “There have been many instances where parliamentarians discussed and deliberated over political matters, especially regional politics and international relations. This greatly enhances synergy in these fields.” Another participant noted that when political understanding is achieved and all parliamentarians become familiar with human rights issues, “the perspectives of parliamentarians from developing and developed countries become aligned, allowing both to contribute to a better life for all people.”

Another action that, according to experts, has strengthened the Committee's position is the reinforcement of operational rule of law. This category emerged from concepts such as emphasis on the implementation of the law and resisting governmental overreach. One participant stated, “Legality and strict adherence to the law are fundamental principles of this Committee. Many of the complaints the Committee receives arise from government pressure or failure to apply legal protections to parliamentarians.” Another participant explained that governments often attempt to exert pressure on or discredit the Committee, but “what

matters is that the Committee does not yield to such pressure and continues defending parliamentarians' rights, which is why I believe the Committee has a bright future."

Another category contributing to the Committee's enhanced status concerns gender equality. This category emerged from concepts such as supporting women parliamentarians, supporting young parliamentarians, and encouraging the maximum participation of women and youth. One participant stated, "Despite claims of equal opportunities and laws, I personally experience many forms of discrimination in my own country. Fortunately, in this Committee, what matters is humanity itself. We have a Forum of Women Parliamentarians, which is very active." Another participant emphasized the Committee's efforts to ensure greater youth participation, noting that one of its main goals is to create appropriate conditions and opportunities for increased participation by women and young parliamentarians.

Experts also identified transparency as another factor contributing to the enhancement of the Committee's status. As reflected in the research model, transparency includes identifying and presenting victims, following up on complainants' cases, and monitoring judicial processes in different countries. One participant noted, "Based on available evidence, the Committee has been very active in identifying and presenting cases of violated parliamentarians." Another participant shared a personal experience, describing the Committee's continuous monitoring and follow-up in the case of a former colleague, which provided reassurance throughout the legal process.

However, some observations by the experts were critical. These were categorized under the theme of weakness in compelling states to cooperate. Participants frequently emphasized that countries may choose not to cooperate with the Committee, and aside from repeated requests and appeals, the Committee lacks the authority to enforce compliance. This lack of cooperation by governments and relevant authorities creates obstacles in obtaining case-related information, making the Committee's work more difficult. The problem becomes more pronounced because the Committee lacks effective enforcement mechanisms to compel states and officials to cooperate or provide necessary information. As a result, case proceedings may be prolonged for years, sometimes to the point where the alleged violation is no

longer relevant due to the completion of the parliamentarian's sentence or even their death.

In summary, based on the categories extracted from participating experts' statements, it can be concluded that the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians took meaningful and effective steps between 2012 and 2022 to enhance its status and advance the development of human rights and the protection of parliamentarians. Nevertheless, the criticism regarding its inability to compel non-cooperative states remains a significant shortcoming—one that may affect the Committee's progress and future development.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### **Declaration**

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### **Transparency Statement**

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### **Ethical Considerations**

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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