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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

HUMAN RIGHTS

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Speech by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. President,

Promoting and protecting human rights is a core objective of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). That is because parliament is *the* State institution at the very heart of human rights. It embodies the fundamental human rights of all people to shape their destiny and participate in the management of their country's public affairs.

Parliament has crucial responsibilities - in the areas of law-making, oversight and budget approval - to promote and protect human rights. The IPU helps parliaments discharge those duties, in particular by making a meaningful contribution to the work of the UN human rights mechanisms.

Last year, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus a landmark resolution on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU, in which it encouraged our Organization to "provide a parliamentary contribution to the human rights treaty body system and to the Human Rights Council ...".

Work to implement this resolution is well under way. In fact, great strides have been made to bring a parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN Human Rights Council. By way of example, in May, for the first time ever, the Human Rights Council, in cooperation with the IPU and OHCHR, held a panel discussion on the contribution of parliaments to its work.

The participants were unanimous in concluding that parliaments had a pivotal role to play in ensuring respect for human rights domestically and that both parliaments and the Human Rights Council stood much to gain from closer cooperation.

Let me share with you three recommendations reiterated by that panel.

First, it is essential to heighten awareness among members of parliament about the existence of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the need for their full involvement in its work.

Second, it is important to promote greater involvement of members of parliaments in the UPR.

Third, it is crucial that the Human Rights Council take concrete steps to engage with parliaments and take their work into account.

Based on these recommendations, the IPU intends to scale up its efforts to heighten awareness among parliaments about the Council, the UPR and their contribution. We already regularly inform parliaments of the forthcoming examination of their countries' national reports and organize capacity-building workshops for parliamentarians to enhance their understanding of the UPR.

Heightened parliamentary awareness should go hand in hand with greater parliamentary involvement in the work of the Council, especially its UPR. The IPU intends to assist parliaments and their members by organizing regional parliamentary meetings to identify specific steps they can take in relation to examination of their country's human rights record. The first such events should take place early next year in Bucharest and Quito.

On the flip side of the coin, how can the Council reach out to parliaments?

A first crucial step would be to adopt a resolution acknowledging the role of parliaments and setting out how to promote that role. This would provide a direct response to the call made by the UN General Assembly to which I referred earlier. The Council could draw inspiration from the experience gained in this area by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and its collaboration with the IPU and parliaments.

Yet the Council's work goes above and beyond the UPR. Indeed, its deliberations cover the full gamut of human rights, which is why the IPU has suggested that the Council consider including a parliamentary perspective on specific human rights issues. For instance, the IPU could work with parliaments on a specific issue during a given year and then report back to the Council. Such a report could provide valuable insights to members of the Council on the implementation of human rights standards.

Already, the IPU works with parliaments on many topics the Council addresses. Of particular interest to us are democracy and the rule of law, children's rights, freedom of expression and assembly, persons with disabilities, integration of a gender perspective and discrimination and violence against women. But we are open to providing a parliamentary perspective on other issues too.

Mr. President,

In September this year, the Human Rights Council will have a golden opportunity to pronounce itself on these and other suggestions that aim to bring the Council and parliaments closer together and establish a genuine partnership. I hope that my intervention has made it clear that the IPU is ready to play its part to make this a reality.

Thank you.