



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement

by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General

United Nations General Assembly joint debate:

Agenda item 52: Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Agenda item 54: Strengthening of the United Nations system

October 4th, 2004

Thank you, Mr. President.

I regret to have to tell you that the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Senator Sergio Páez Verdugo, has had to be present in Chile for an important vote in Parliament. I am therefore delivering his statement on behalf of the IPU.

Under these items, I would like to refer to the Report by the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on relations between the United Nations and civil society, including parliamentarians and the private sector.

Perhaps I might begin by stating the obvious: that parliaments are entirely different from civil society and do not belong in that category. I believe that the need for a wholly distinct approach to parliaments was also recognized by the Panel members after they began their work, in particular when they resorted to the more traditional term of "non-governmental organizations", as it appears in Article 71 of the UN Charter, thereby clearly excluding parliaments.

That being said, I nonetheless welcome the scope and the vision of the Cardoso Report. We believe that it is right in drawing attention to the need for the United Nations to consolidate and expand its working relationship with the international parliamentary community. There are three reasons for this, on which I will elaborate in the course of these remarks. The first is that the democracy deficit currently facing the United Nations has to be resolved. The second is the need to mobilize better awareness and more active support by national parliaments for the work of the United Nations. Finally, it is imperative that the voice of the people, expressed through their elected representatives, is heard more clearly in this important body.

This is an idea that we at the Inter-Parliamentary Union have been advocating for many years and we have deployed significant efforts to its realization, both within the Organization and in our respective national parliaments. Indeed, it is at the very heart of our mandate. The Inter-Parliamentary Union marshals substantive parliamentary support for international action, and, as the world organization of parliaments, the IPU is the only global institution that can mobilize parliamentary action worldwide.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is the global organization of parliaments that has been committed to world peace and to democracy for over a century. It is in constant contact with all parliaments of the world and has a growing membership, currently bringing together 140 national parliaments and many regional parliamentary organizations, such as the European Parliament, the Latin American Parliament and the new African Parliament. It has solid tradition and experience, and structures, including three standing committees that examine questions relating to peace and international security; finance, development and trade; and democracy and human rights.

A little over four years ago, the Millennium Declaration recognized the need to strengthen further the cooperation between parliaments and the United Nations, and recommended that this be done through the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This came as a result of the First Conference of Speakers of Parliaments convened by the IPU, that had taken place here in New York just a few days earlier, at which the Speakers had pledged their commitment and support to the United Nations, particularly in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and voiced their determination to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of international cooperation, with the United Nations at its core.

In making this recommendation in the Millennium Declaration, the Heads of State and Government recognized the role that the IPU can play. Moreover, they did not seek to change the nature of the United Nations, which is and will remain an intergovernmental organization, and they recognized that parliamentary action in relation to international cooperation must first and foremost take place at the national level.

Turning once again to the Cardoso Panel, the Report causes concern to parliaments and their international organization - the IPU - because it suggests that the United Nations, an intergovernmental institution, should create its own inter-parliamentary structures. This would obviously result in duplication of the work currently undertaken by the IPU. Secondly, and more importantly, it runs contrary to the principle of separation of powers between the legislative and the executive branch of government. To put it simply, the Inter-Parliamentary Union strongly believes that it is wholly inappropriate for the United Nations to consider organizing the work of members of Parliament. If the goal is indeed to bridge the democratic deficit and bring the voice of the people closer to the United Nations, then it is important that we get this right.

For all of these reasons, parliamentary leaders have taken it upon themselves to consult widely in their capitals and within their parliaments on how best to bring forward the substantive recommendations of the Cardoso Panel. In practical terms, they intend to channel these consultations through the preparatory mechanism for the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments which, as a follow-up to the first World Conference in New York in August 2000, is scheduled to take place here at UN Headquarters in early September of next year, before the opening of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly. They will thus be in a position to deliver to you the conclusions of their consultations in the second half of next year.

This second World Conference of Speakers will focus on cooperation with the United Nations, on parliamentary contribution to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, and on progress achieved in developing a reference framework on parliamentary democracy. As always, we are working closely with the United Nations Secretariat to make this a successful joint event.

We have read with great attention the Report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Cardoso Panel's recommendations and we look forward to working closely with him and with the United Nations with a view to shaping effective mechanisms for stronger interaction between parliaments and the United Nations.

The 111th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union has just completed its proceedings in Geneva. On that occasion, we met with the Executive Director of UN-AIDS, with whom we have developed a close working relationship over the years, aimed at building a global focus for the work of parliamentarians on AIDS. Together, we have formulated and implemented a series of sound projects, including the publication of a Guide for Parliamentarians which focuses on developing adequate legislation in the fight against HIV-AIDS, good practices and recommended policies. New projects are in the making for the future, including setting up a special or select parliamentary committee on HIV-AIDS.

In the light of the high-level meetings in 2005 and 2006, together with Dr. Peter Piot we have agreed to devote particular attention to the question of the role and responsibility of parliaments in the fight against HIV-AIDS, on the occasion of the forthcoming Assembly of the IPU, to be held in April of next year in Manila. The ensuing results, conclusions and recommendations will then be fed into the United Nations intergovernmental process, and certainly brought to your attention here in the General Assembly.

In conclusion, Mr. President, please allow me to thank you for your leadership, not just here in the United Nations, but also within the Inter-Parliamentary Union, where Gabon has been an active and valued member for very many years. The Speaker of the Parliament of Gabon will be traveling to New York in just two weeks' time, to participate in our annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations. We ourselves will then be traveling to Libreville in May 2005, for the third and final preparatory meeting of the Parliamentary Summit next year. As always, we know we will be able to count on your country's full support.

Thank you.