



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

General Assembly - Agenda item 122 (m): Cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Statement by Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General
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Mr. President,

It is a particular pleasure to take the floor at a time when the United Nations General Assembly is led by a formidable Swiss politician. As an organization of national parliaments that has its headquarters in Geneva, the IPU owes much to the parliament, government and people of Switzerland.

I bring the greetings of the President of the IPU, Speaker Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia. A fortnight ago you jointly opened the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations which, I believe, injected a strong parliamentary contribution into the discussions on global economic governance and the central role of the United Nations system that you are coordinating here.

Mr. President,

I must begin by thanking Ambassador Emvula and the Permanent Mission of Namibia for spearheading consultations with member States and tabling a substantive and visionary draft resolution. I would also like to thank all the Missions that have sponsored this draft. I would like to extend a very special word of thanks to the Permanent Representatives of Egypt, India, Chile and Italy, whose countries have held the Presidency of the IPU in recent years and who have all shown strong and proactive support.

As the latest report of the UN Secretary-General amply demonstrates, there has been much cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU over the past two years. Without dwelling on the details of this ample agenda, I would like to highlight a few points of particular relevance.

At the end of last year, the General Assembly mandated the IPU to contribute to preparations for the MDG Summit. The issue was high on the agenda of the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments held earlier this year, and parliaments around the world have offered us information on how they are performing legislative work on the MDGs. Our findings were put before our Parliamentary Summit and have been shared with UN Member States.

The Speakers meeting in Geneva pledged to do more than try to factor the development goals into the daily parliamentary schedule and to have them enacted in law. They also encouraged all parliaments examining draft budgets and bills to consider their effects on the fulfillment of the MDGs. The IPU will continue mobilizing parliamentary action

towards the achievement of the MDGs by the target date of 2015. This - I suggest - will anchor the role of the United Nations in global governance more firmly in the bedrock of national politics.

I arrived in New York today from Cancun. The IPU was present at the International Conference on Climate Change, bringing together the MPs, building political support among parliaments for a sound international agreement and feeding their viewpoints into the Conference. Indeed, for many years the IPU has engaged parliaments on issues that are central to the ambitions of the UN, such as financing for development, gender, HIV-AIDS, climate change, or LDCs. The resolution before you acknowledges the value of such exchanges and proposes more systematic engagement with the IPU.

Other operative paragraphs build on the joint work we have been conducting within the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC, the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review.

We salute the establishment of UN Women and look forward to strong cooperation in the years ahead. When it comes to the political empowerment of women and speaking out against violence against women, we know that we have something unique to share. We are also looking closely at how national parliaments can bring a much more profound appreciation of the mutually supportive roles of men and women into the fabric of politics. Behind the jargon of “gender mainstreaming” the IPU is undertaking pioneering work to instituting real change in parliaments so as to make them gender sensitive. The prospects are exciting, and the Resolution rightly recognizes this.

The IPU promotes democracy and helps build strong parliaments. Representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective parliaments are vital to peace and development. Both our institutions have much to contribute in this field, and we welcome the fact that the draft resolution specifically encourages us to help facilitate closer cooperation between the UN and parliaments at the national level, including in terms of strengthening parliamentary capacities, reinforcing the rule of law and helping to align national legislation with international commitments.

The IPU is pleased that the General Assembly is proposing a stand-alone agenda item for consideration at the 66th session on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU. As Ambassador Emvula said, this is more than a procedural review of the growing cooperation between two partner organizations. It seeks to open up the discussion on how the United Nations, as a system, can relate more coherently to parliaments and parliamentarians. The legislatures form a constituency that can bring significant weight to global governance, making it more transparent, accountable and effective.

This is not about setting up new institutions; quite the opposite. What we want is a candid exchange on what works well and what does not. Earlier this year in Geneva parliamentary leaders started this debate based on an IPU survey on how parliaments organize their work with the United Nations and an IPU position paper on parliamentary engagement with the UN. The time has now come to widen this discussion to include the UN Member States in the General Assembly.

I thank you for your attention.