



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

General Assembly Joint Debate on

Strengthening of the United Nations System [112]
Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit [113]
United Nations reform: measures and proposals [149]

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New York, 20 November 2006

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Madam President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the General Assembly on agenda item [112] as it relates to strengthening the United Nations system. It will come as no surprise to you that I will refer to this theme from the perspective of the consolidated parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations.

As the resolution adopted by consensus in this hall on October 20th attests, the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union are working together on virtually every item on the agenda for peace, democracy and development. The concern with democracy in particular is central to our joint action, as we saw very recently at the 6th International Conference on New and Restored Democracies in Doha. Democracy, together with development, is the best defence against conflict and the best guarantee for lasting peace. The recent memorandum of understanding between the IPU and the UN Democracy Fund, and the close consultations under way with the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, augur well for increased cooperation in this area for the years to come.

The resolution also calls for the further development of the Annual Parliamentary Hearing and other specialized parliamentary meetings at the United Nations, as joint UN-IPU events. The formal recognition of the joint nature of these events will require the United Nations to take partial ownership of them, and eventually fully integrate them into the UN's overall agenda and meeting schedule.

Moreover, the resolution states that the IPU is now invited to be more closely involved in the elaboration of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations "with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments to the work of the United Nations." That provision will help us improve the coordination of our respective operational activities so that we can better support each other in the field. It will also help us plan future activities in the light of the recommendations that may come out of the annual hearing and other specialized meetings.

How does all this relate to the strengthening of the United Nations system? First and foremost, let me remind you of what we mean by the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations.

This dimension has to be forged by parliaments and their members. It has to be firmly rooted in the activities that parliaments carry out at the national level, at home. It includes action by parliaments to contribute to and monitor international negotiations and debates at the UN and in related agencies, to oversee the enforcement of what is adopted by governments, and to ensure national compliance with international norms and the rule of law. It also involves scrutinizing the activities of the United Nations and providing input into their deliberations.

The IPU is convinced that members of parliaments can play an extremely important role in building national political support for international action. In IPU's view, which is shared by many UN Member States, the United Nations stands to gain considerably by making sure that parliaments and their members have a full and undistorted understanding of major processes and activities under way at the United Nations.

The 2006 Parliamentary Hearing held at the beginning of last week in the ECOSOC Chamber was, we feel, a very positive indication that this is indeed possible. The meeting enjoyed tremendous interest from the national parliaments, which were well represented. It also drew in many representatives from the Permanent Missions, including Permanent Representatives, as well as UN officials and academia. There was a substantive and inter-active discussion on issues that are high on the United Nations agenda – conflict prevention, peace building, good governance and the fight against corruption, which resulted in a number of proposals for action by parliaments at the national level, in support of United Nations initiatives. The results of this Hearing will be circulated at the United Nations in the coming weeks, as an official document of the General Assembly.

Let me give you just one example of what came out of the Hearing. Participating legislators very much welcomed the opportunity to learn about the new UN Peacebuilding Commission, its mandate and operational expectations. They stressed the need for the Commission to give particular focus to the institution of parliament. All too often in the past, they argued, the international community invested huge amounts of resources and funds in preparing for free and fair elections, only to immediately abandon the very institution that was born out of the respective elections. Parliament, I think we all agree, is the forum designed to bring together all the various groups within society, and that work within Parliament therefore provides a very real alternative to war.

But a new, embryonic parliament does not run itself; it needs to be nurtured, and – in the early years at least - it needs to receive as much assistance as possible, first and foremost from the international community.

So in discussing the PBC, participants repeatedly stressed the need for adequate funding of the Peacebuilding Fund, and pledged to take this message back home to their capitals, with a view to building greater political support for the Fund. More generally, they felt that parliaments could play an important role in bridging the divide between peacebuilding and development assistance. They called attention to the danger of relapse into conflict, which should not be ignored. They emphasized the crucial importance of involving women in all aspects of the peacebuilding exercise, and pledged to play a more pro-active role in the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. And in particular they argued strongly in favour of placing democratically elected parliaments high among the priorities of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Madam President,

These are just some of the ways in which the IPU intends to continue to work, and in so doing help strengthen the United Nations system. I thank you for your attention.