



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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## **Statement of the President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development**

*Johannesburg, 30 August 2002*

Already in 1972, at the first Summit in Stockholm, and then again in 1982 in Nairobi, and in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, we all received a wake-up call: the world's resources are finite and we have to learn to live in a sustainable manner.

During these thirty years, we have learned that pollution kills people, animals and vegetation; that poverty, in all its ugliness, nurtures more pollution and waste; that mindless consumption and wasteful production methods exact a heavy toll on society at large and on the environment; and that the environment itself, on which our very existence depends, is being sacrificed beyond the point of no-return.

But we have also learned that the solution to all these problems is within our reach. Rapid technological advancements can help us achieve economic growth without harming the environment. What has become known as "green economics" has taught us the many creative ways in which the cost to the environment can be factored into production and consumption. It is much cheaper to prevent further degradation of the environment and the social fabric than to pay later on for the clean up and the repair.

Despite this wisdom, we have largely failed. The record of inaction and failure that has been compiled at this conference speaks for itself. The question, then, is why have we failed and what guarantees do we have that we will not continue to fail?

Speaking as a politician, I know that a main, if not the main part of the equation is our ability to listen to people and to act on their wishes. Currently, we have a clear democratic deficit in decision-making, both nationally and internationally.

Far too many governments and institutions in the position of power take decisions with only narrow interests in mind. More often than not, they do not represent fairly the will of the people and certainly do not pursue the common good. Only too often, decision-makers do not listen to the people, and especially to the poor, and are instead pursuing parochial interests, and, in the worst of cases, are entirely corrupt.

To make matters worse, the liberalizing ethos of the 80s and 90s, which has led to greater reliance on market forces as a cure for all ills, has greatly reduced the role of government. Today's more complex economic processes are increasingly difficult to control and even the most well-intentioned policy makers find it difficult to impose decisions that are called for from a sustainable development perspective.

Democracy, however, can only be suppressed for so long. People everywhere are increasingly making their voices heard. They demand representation. They want accountability, transparency and fairness. And they expect their governments to be in control and to help them solve some of their problems.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved in many parts of the world if we do not aggressively address the AIDS pandemic. People who are infected by HIV/AIDS require medicine at affordable prices. Only governments can provide this. Sustainable development cannot be achieved if millions of people continue to live in abject poverty. Reversing the poverty cycle will require action by governments as well.

These are fundamental truths that we, members of parliament who the people have elected to represent them, easily recognize. Ever since Rio, we are working together within our world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on sustainable development issues. At the national level, we are enhancing the capacity of parliaments to address these sometimes very complex issues.

At the international level, we aim to provide a parliamentary dimension to the concerned intergovernmental bodies. Thus, we are strengthening our cooperation with the United Nations and its various agencies and programmes, as well as the World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods institutions. In this exercise, our objectives are threefold: to bring the views of people to the intergovernmental negotiating fora; to inform members of parliament of the issues of stake so that they can better meet their parliamentary responsibilities at home; and to monitor the international processes on behalf of the people.

Bringing a parliamentary dimension to the intergovernmental organizations as a means of making them more democratic is no small task. It will require hard work and perseverance, but we believe that it can and must be done. We are strengthened in our conviction by the Millennium Declaration which itself recognizes the need for the United Nations to work much more closely with national parliaments through the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the future.

One important component of our strategy involves bringing members of parliament to the summits being organized by the United Nations, such as the one that has brought us here to Johannesburg. As I speak, some three hundred parliamentarians from all over the world are hard at work debating a Declaration which focuses on their role in implementing the outcome of this summit.

This Declaration will become an important reference point for us and, we hope, for the United Nations. Through it, we will commit to working ever more closely with the United Nations and the relevant international organizations for a more equitable, democratic and sustainable world. The Declaration will be issued later today, and I invite all of you to read it and take it home with you as an important contribution of parliaments to this Summit and its follow up.