



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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131st IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 12 - 16.10.2014

Governing Council
Item 4

CL/195/4(a)-R.1
5 September 2014

Report of the President

(a) On his activities since the 194th session of the Governing Council

The final six months of my term as President of the IPU have been memorable. As usual, I have been in close contact with the outgoing Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, with whom I had the privilege and honour to work right up until the end of his term on 30 June. Over the years we developed a professional relationship based on mutual respect and trust and I would like to think that we formed a special friendship. I have developed the same relationship with his successor, Mr. Martin Chungong. Over the past several months, we have worked together to ensure a smooth transition.

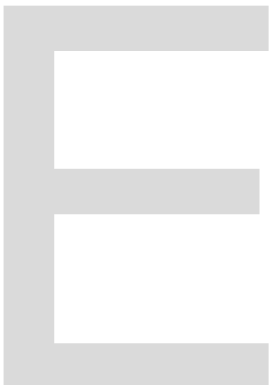
In May, I travelled to New York for the 68th session of the UN General Assembly, specifically the session on *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union*. I addressed the General Assembly, recalling the origins of the relationship between the United Nations and the IPU, which had been formally cemented in 1996 through the conclusion of a cooperation agreement. Since then, both Organizations had developed a mutually beneficial partnership, which it was hoped would grow from strength to strength.

I recalled that the IPU predated the United Nations and was thus the oldest political multilateral organization in the world. It was also the only global organization of parliaments. I outlined the challenges facing both organizations – the lack of trust in politicians, the democracy deficit and failure to always meet expectations. I proposed that part of the solution to such problems would be enhanced governance.

I enumerated the several areas of cooperation linking our organizations through joint activities with UNDP, the CEDAW Committee, UN Women and the Human Rights Council. I recalled that the IPU also organized every year in November a joint Parliamentary Hearing with the United Nations at UN Headquarters in New York.

I made it very clear that the IPU wished to be involved in the post-2015 agenda from the outset and that it would be campaigning actively for a stand-alone goal on governance among the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I have appealed to all national parliaments to play a strong role in the post-2015 development architecture, particularly in terms of implementation. I have also reached out to the relevant UN bodies, making the case for a role for parliaments and the IPU, especially in terms of ensuring accountability.

The culmination of that session at the UN was the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 68/272, which inter alia welcomed the inclusion of legislators in delegations to major UN meetings and processes, the preparations underway for the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and in general, called for a “strategic partnership” between the United Nations and the IPU. The resolution was co-sponsored by 89 UN Member States and spearheaded by Morocco as the country holding the IPU presidency.



On 10 June, I travelled to Cairo at the invitation of the Egyptian authorities to attend the inauguration of President Al-Sisi. During my visit, I met with the President and various ministers. The Egyptian President appealed to the IPU to lend greater support to his country and the region as a whole. He expressed appreciation for the IPU's work and undertook to put in place a fully functioning and representative parliament in due course.

The IPU, as part of its capacity-building work, had provided assistance to Egypt on a new electoral law that would include ambitious and strong affirmative action measures. Such provisions would ensure better representation of women and other groups in the next parliament. An IPU assessment team was dispatched to Cairo soon after to identify needs and conduct training for parliamentary staff. A general review of existing procedures and practices was undertaken in addition to specific budget preparation training. In addition, a headquarters agreement was signed with Egypt to establish an IPU outpost in the country. That was in keeping with the new Secretary General's vision of decentralizing the IPU and creating regional offices.

I was invited by the Crans-Montana Forum to attend its 25th session in my own backyard, Rabat. I participated in a segment on *Peace and development in the Mediterranean: Improving cooperation and building a better world*. In my address I stated that the Mediterranean was the cradle of many civilizations: Egypt, Greece, Rome, Baghdad, Fez and Andalusia. Some of the most important political, diplomatic and military moments in History had taken place on both sides of the Mediterranean.

I evoked the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), which had been spearheaded by the IPU in 1980s and 1990s. That process had laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), of which I had the honour of being the first President elected in 2006 in Amman, Jordan, and of which I remain honorary President.

On 21 June, I was bestowed with the Foundation Prize for 2014 by the Crans-Montana Forum, which I would like to thank on this occasion. That was a real honour for me and for the IPU.

I witnessed history in the making on 30 June when the IPU celebrated its 125th anniversary. I convened an extraordinary session of the Executive Committee on the anniversary date - 30 June – and 1 July to commemorate that watershed moment in our Organization's history and to oversee the handover from the outgoing to the incoming Secretary General. A joint interactive session was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) on *Driving democratic change – IPU at 125 and beyond*. The vision of our Founding Fathers of a world where differences could be resolved through dialogue and negotiation rather than conflict still held true today.

Later that evening, I presided over the formal handing-over ceremony between the outgoing Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson, and the incoming one, Martin Chungong. The changing of the guard took place during a reception over which I presided at the House of Parliaments. It was attended by the Swiss authorities, the Mayor of Grand-Saconnex, the diplomatic community in Geneva and IPU partners.

On 1 July, I welcomed the new Secretary General to his first session of the Executive Committee in that capacity. I congratulated him on his election, wishing him the very best in his new functions and assuring him of my support.

Since October 2011, the IPU has embarked upon the implementation of its first ever strategy, which it adopted in Bern. This Strategy for 2012-2017, in whose preparation I was involved, serves as a roadmap to this day. A good part of this Strategy has already been implemented, notably in terms of reform of IPU Assemblies, the composition and working methods of the Standing Committees and the creation of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU.

Also early in my term, I launched the first *Global Parliamentary Report* that examined "The changing nature of parliamentary representation" during the IPU Assembly held in Kampala, Uganda. This was a ground-breaking publication that underscored the vital role of parliaments while recognizing the growing demands of the electorate. Citizens were no longer satisfied with merely casting their ballot every few years; they wanted to be involved and participate in the realization of public policy. This flagship joint IPU-UNDP publication stands as a reference for all parliaments and policymakers.

There is much work still to be done. All around us conflict is rife and there are many hot spots and pockets of instability in the world. The situation in the Middle East continues to worsen and a peaceful political solution might just slip out of the hands of the parties to the conflict if they did not seize it soon. Our Committee on Middle East Questions would have to find renewed vigour and redefine its remit and role in order to make a meaningful contribution in the current context at the parliamentary level. Regarding the situation in Gaza, the IPU has issued three official press releases, calling for restraint, condemning violence on both sides, urging parliaments to shoulder their responsibility to protect citizens, and most recently, for a cessation to the hostilities and the resumption of dialogue.

To this day, parliamentarians throughout the world continue to be subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, death threats and even forced disappearance. Regrettably, our Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians will always have its hands full. It has a good track record and has good reason to feel a sense of satisfaction. How many times over the years had it helped secure the release of certain MPs, shed light on the fate of others and raise awareness about the plight of others still whose rights continued to be flouted or who remained in prison?

On 3 September, I travelled to Geneva to preside over the inauguration of the IPU exhibition on the emblematic Quai Wilson to mark its 125 years. The exhibition – entitled *Parliamentary action in the service of peace and democracy*– was made up of 50 panels containing snapshots and snippets of information on the work of the IPU since its inception. In my opening address, I thanked the Geneva and Swiss authorities for being such gracious hosts to the IPU and for allowing it to set up its Headquarters in a city of peace and a land of neutrality.

The following morning, I presided over the opening of the Ninth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament at IPU Headquarters, an annual event to which I attach particular importance. Held under the theme of *Women's economic empowerment*, the meeting brought together over 16 Women Speakers and Deputy Speakers from across the world. In my opening remarks, while I lamented the fact that less than 15 per cent of parliamentary chambers in the world were presided over by women, I took consolation in the knowledge that there is strength in unity.

I underscored that insufficient attention had been paid to women's economic empowerment, which was one of the reasons why poverty still persisted in so many parts of the world. Women accounted for half of the world's population and yet faced so many forms of inequality. "To deprive a nation of half its potential", I added, was tantamount to "see with one eye, to walk with one leg".

I urged all members of parliament to live up to their responsibilities and serve the interest of all their constituents, especially women. I appealed to the Women Speakers to make their voices heard and to discharge their parliamentary functions of law-making, oversight and representation with rigour to advance the cause of women in their countries and to serve as mentors to other women aspiring to a better future.

As I look back on these past six months and on my three-year term in general, I cannot help but feel a sense of satisfaction having been at the helm of this Organization. It has been an enriching and unforgettable experience for me. The IPU – in keeping with its principles and values – has accomplished many great things during this period in spite of seemingly insurmountable challenges. Our Organization has had to tackle problems spawned by an economic crisis and the ramifications of the upheavals in several regions of the world. Yet our Organization has never lost hope or given up. It has always persevered, practising what it preaches about dialogue and negotiation.

We can be proud of our many accomplishments together. We have made a real difference on the ground in innumerable little ways, which cumulatively represented great strides. Those went from helping draft legislation to prevent or punish violence against women, to building the capacity of fledgling parliaments and training new MPs, to mainstreaming gender into our own structures and encouraging parliaments to become more gender-sensitive institutions. All of the IPU's core areas of activity were very close to my heart and went a long way to improving the daily lives of citizens across the world.

I wish to appeal to the new Secretary General and his team to showcase the good work of the Organization by enhancing its visibility on the international arena. I would also urge them to improve the IPU's international status as a full-fledged international organization, with all the privileges and immunities that are incumbent to such entities. Last but not least, the day must come when the United Nations recognizes the IPU for its true worth and full value – an indispensable partner and a harbinger of good governance at the global level. I welcome the efforts that have been made on both sides to this end.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to pay tribute to the IPU Secretariat under the leadership of the former Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, and now under the leadership of Mr. Martin Chungong. Without their cooperation and support, it would have been difficult for me to carry out my functions as President. I take this opportunity to thank them all here.