



Speech to be delivered by the Speaker of the National Council, Mr. Jean-René Germanier, at the Inaugural Ceremony of the 125th IPU Assembly at Bernexpo

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Bern, Sunday, 16 October, 2011

Madam President of the Swiss Confederation,
Honourable Speaker of the Council of Nations,
Secretary-General of the United Nations,
President of the IPU,
Secretary General of the IPU,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, Sunday 16 October 2011, all roads lead to Bern. The parliamentary delegations of 130 countries, bringing together over 1,400 members of parliament, have converged on the Federal Capital at the invitation of the Swiss Parliament. Indeed, the 125th Assembly of the Inter-



Parliamentary Union is conferring on our tiny political capital the status of capital of the world's parliaments.

For a mere three days, let me reassure from the outset the President of Switzerland, Mrs. Micheline Calmy-Rey, and the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, that Bern has no intention of competing with the international city of Geneva.

But Bern has quite a history of its own (as I'm sure the city's Mayor, Alexander Tschäppät, would agree). Bern was the seat of the first IPU Headquarters and the Bernese State Councillor, Charles-Albert Gobat, was at the helm of the organization, which he steered for 17 years from his office in the old town.

When the politician from the French-speaking party of the Canton of Bern was awarded the Noble Peace Prize in 1902 for his commitment to advancing democracy and protecting human rights, Bern was honoured and all IPU action found greater legitimacy.

Our little capital also has fond memories of the great pride it felt on hosting the 4th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in 1892, after the first three were held successively in Paris,



London and Rome. The 107 delegates from 13 States met back then in the former Hall of the National Council. It was on that occasion that Charles-Albert Gobat was elected Secretary General and Director of the IPU Office.

Thirty-two years later, 211 delegates from the 26 States represented at the 22nd Inter-Parliamentary Conference were invited to gather at the new Parliament Building. They debated disarmament and parliamentary oversight of State foreign policy. The Swiss Parliament played host again to the 41st Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the last time in the National Council Hall in 1952. The 294 delegates from the 34 States represented discussed specifically the idea of a world parliament.

Distinguished delegates,

The Swiss Parliament has bided its time. It could not miss this chance to host the 125th IPU Assembly, after having hosted the Meeting of Women Speakers last year. This jubilee is a golden opportunity to strengthen our ties and I wish you a successful conference at the Bernexpo Conference Centre.



In the margins of your Assembly, you will be able to take the pulse of Swiss democracy as we are in the throes of election campaigning. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the election of the first women members to our Houses of Parliament.

You will come across a very varied array of well-known personalities: Bertrand Piccard, the inventor of Solar Impulse, Jorge Sampaio, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and Cheick Sidi Diarra, UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, to name but a few.

But for now, I invite each and every one of you to discover our recently refurbished Federal Palace at the reception this evening.

Thank you all for travelling to Bern. Through your presence, and your valuable contribution to the Parliament of Parliaments, you are writing a new chapter in the long and beautiful history of the ties between Switzerland and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.