

**Inter-Parliamentary Union**  
125<sup>th</sup> Assembly and related meetings  
Bern, Switzerland  
16–19 October 2011



## **INAUGURAL CEREMONY**

### **SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

Madam President,  
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,  
Mr. President of the National Council,  
Mr. President of the Council of States,  
Mr. Mayor,  
Fellow Parliamentarians,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Government and people of Switzerland, represented here by Her Excellency President Micheline Calmy-Rey, for the warm welcome they have given us.

We are privileged to be in your beautiful alpine country at a time when the citizens of Switzerland prepare to exercise their democratic right to choose their representatives in parliament. I can think of no better setting for this 125<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. What a memory to take home with us.

I would like to thank United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for honouring us with his presence here today and to congratulate him on his brilliant re-election for a second term as United Nations Secretary-General. There is tremendous value in further strengthening a strategic partnership between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU, both in dealing with the global challenges facing us and in delivering on major international commitments. We are grateful, Mr. Secretary-General, for your constant support for the IPU to this end and look forward to working closely with you towards building a better world.

I wish to say a special word of gratitude to the Parliament of Switzerland for hosting our Assembly. It is only fitting, I think, that we convene in Bern to decide on IPU's future development, considering the hugely important role which this city has played in IPU's history. Thank you for making that possible.

In fact, the city of Bern, Mr. Mayor, is closely associated with the development of the IPU. In many ways we can trace the birth of the IPU as a formal institution to the first meeting the IPU held in Bern in 1892. It was here that it met for the first time in a parliament and where it created the first governing structures and elected its first Secretary General, Albert Gobat.

Mr. Gobat was an illustrious Swiss scholar and politician from the then Canton of Bern and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate. He gave the name Inter-Parliamentary Union to this organization and

played a very important role in its early development. Anders Johnsson, our current Secretary General, has been faithful to this heritage.

The IPU returned to Bern in 1924. On that occasion, the members launched a debate which has marked our organization and which remains with us today: a preoccupation with parliaments, their role and responsibilities in a democratic society.

At that meeting, for the first time, the IPU formulated recommendations aiming to strengthen parliament's oversight of foreign policy. At the proposal of a Swiss member of parliament the IPU also decided to launch a study of the parliamentary system. Ever since then, the IPU has consecrated an important part of its time and resources to studying and strengthening the parliamentary institution.

The last time the IPU held a statutory meeting in Bern was in 1952. This was a few years after the creation of the United Nations and, not surprisingly, international cooperation and parliaments' part in it were high on the agenda. You may be amused to know, Mr. Secretary-General, that on that occasion members also debated the possible creation of a world parliament. In some ways, this is another debate that remains with us still today even though the IPU itself has never made it its own cause. We pursue a different strategy that places national parliaments at the centre of action together with the IPU.

Madam President,  
Fellow parliamentarians,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

A great deal of what we will be discussing in the coming days reflects the preoccupations facing the world today. Countries in North Africa and the Middle East are undergoing profound changes. Popular aspirations for freedom and democracy have brought challenges that were unimaginable only a year ago.

Undemocratic rule and repression cannot advance peace and security in any country. I wish to state most emphatically that as President of the IPU, an organization that is committed to dialogue and the advancement of democracy, I condemn the violent repression that we are seeing in so many countries. That simply is not acceptable and must end now. It is thus only fitting that here in Bern we will be looking at how to promote and practise good governance as a means of advancing peace and security, while drawing lessons from recent events in those countries.

Many countries, some of them not so far away from Switzerland, are going through tough economic times and uncertainty about the future. I am therefore grateful to our Swiss hosts for having taken the initiative to hold a panel discussion on the reform of the financial markets. It is my hope that the panel will help us come up with recommendations for parliamentary action. Wherever we look, we see people suffering the consequences of a crisis and mismanagement, which is not of their making. As representatives of the people we cannot let this sorry state of affairs continue.

We will also discuss the ownership of the international agendas. Successfully tackling today's global challenges demands that we look at the governance of our international institutions and at the arrangements between nations as well as at some of our processes within nations. Effective international accountability depends on strong, vibrant local, regional and national systems of democracy.

There are many other issues that we will debate - nuclear disarmament, securing health of women and children, the green economy, climate change, to mention but a few. We will also be hearing from the UN Secretary- General's High Representatives for the Alliance of Civilizations and for the Least Developed Countries. In short, we can look forward to interesting and fruitful debates on a wide variety of subjects that are of direct concern to people everywhere these days.

Let me however close my remarks by inviting all of you to use this Assembly in Bern wisely and, as on past occasions, send a powerful message from this beautiful city, charting a clear direction for the future development of our institution, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Throughout much of my Presidency we have debated the mission of the IPU in today's world. We have drawn up a visionary strategy that places inter-parliamentary cooperation and the IPU at the service of parliaments, democracy and international cooperation through the United Nations system. The IPU is ready to play its part.

IPU's strategy is inspired by our conviction that better parliaments make for stronger democracies. I invite all of you to unite behind this vision so that together we can work to achieve the noble aspirations of this time-honoured home of parliaments.

I thank you all for coming here to Bern, and I wish you an enriching and successful Assembly.

Thank you.