



127th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Related Meetings
Québec City, Canada
21-26 October 2012

127^{ème} Assemblée de l'Union interparlementaire et réunions connexes
Québec, Canada
21-26 octobre 2012



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INAUGURAL CEREMONY

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Your Excellency Mr. Governor General,
Hon. Speaker of the Senate,
Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly of Quebec,
Hon. Mayor of the City of Quebec
Hon. President of the Canadian Group of the IPU,
Mr. Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Members of the Executive Committee,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, Mr. Governor-General of Canada, to express my sincere gratitude to you, and through you, to thank Canada, its people, its Parliament, in particular the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons, for inviting the Inter-Parliamentary Union to hold its 127th Assembly in this beautiful and world renowned city of Quebec.

I wish to thank our Canadian hosts for their warm welcome, hospitality and excellent organization of the Assembly proceedings.

Canada is known for the vast diversity of its territory and above all for the vast diversity of Canadian society, and for its ability to allow all ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and political components of society to live in harmony.

Canada has been an active Member of the IPU for a long time now, having joined the Organization in 1912.

2012, therefore, marks the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Parliament's affiliation to the IPU. What better way could there be to celebrate that centenary than by holding our Organization's 127th Assembly here?

Ladies and gentlemen, the Quebec Assembly promises to be special in every way, with a rich format and agenda. Throughout the Assembly we will be holding a "special" plenary debate on the theme of *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*. We will conclude our debate with an outcome document that should offer us many clues as to how better deal with ever increasing diversity, turn it into our advantage and, in the process, build more inclusive and tolerant societies.

It is my belief that as parliamentarians we have a duty to uphold cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial and religious diversity as a global value, a value that should be respected,

encouraged, and protected within and among all societies and civilizations. I would like to stress here that it is a value that should apply not just to our societies as a whole but also to our organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Indeed, the IPU strives to be universal but it cannot achieve universality without espousing participation, integration and inclusiveness.

This is why I very much regret that not all the parliamentarians who had registered to attend our Assembly in Quebec have been successful in obtaining entry visas to Canada, in contravention of the terms of the agreement that was signed. Let me therefore take this opportunity to firmly underscore, once again, the IPU's fundamental principle that IPU Assemblies need to provide a space where all Member Parliaments and their designated delegates, without exception, can meet and engage with one another. If we do indeed believe in political diversity and the value of parliamentary diplomacy, this fundamental principle cannot be compromised. Consequently, we consider that what has just happened is an unfortunate and regrettable turn of events, one that is not only serious but unprecedented in the history of our Organization, which spans 123 years.

Were this to set a precedent, the Organization would be changed forever.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the next three days we will be holding a Special Session on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. I am proud to be at the helm of an organization that champions the specific cause of women in political life. During this session we will be developing a Plan of Action that should help us assess our own parliaments when it comes to being gender-sensitive institutions. Doubtless some of us have already made strides in this direction, while many more of us have some way to go.

This 127th Assembly is also special in that we have an extended programme of events with panel sessions covering a wide cross-section of themes ranging from creating opportunities for youth, building peace after conflict and parliamentary immunity to peak oil and prospects for energy security.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are meeting in turbulent times. Barely a quarter century has passed since the Cold War was coming to an end. I can still remember the euphoria; the belief widely shared at that time that we could now start building a more stable and peaceful world, one based on greater solidarity and fraternity and founded on values shared by all of us and firmly rooted in the precepts of democracy.

Since then it is true that we have seen one country after another instituting democratic reforms. Enormous efforts have been made to lift millions of people out of poverty and the Millennium Development Goals have helped us focus on bringing essential services to the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

Yet, looking around the globe today, I cannot say that we have always been successful.

We see new fault lines developing along religious, racial, cultural and political divides that we could not have fathomed 25 years ago, with rising intolerance. Slightings or disrespect for other people's faiths are met with manifestations and acts of violence.

We witness the development of international criminality and lawlessness on an unprecedented scale. It is claiming the lives of hundreds if not thousands of people every day. Organized crime syndicates are threatening to become more powerful than the State in certain cases.

Terrorist groups destabilize and inflict untold suffering on many countries. The rule of law is undermined in a myriad of ways, both at the national and international level, and the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law are flouted every day.

The conflict in Syria is threatening to engulf the region in conflict and may well end up igniting sectarian violence throughout the Middle East and beyond as the United Nations and Arab League mediator in the Syrian conflict has stated. Syria is not the only conflict. There are many others; the one that erupted in Mali six months ago is just the latest in a string of crises that affect millions of people within and beyond the borders of the State.

It would seem that our base instincts still continue to get the better of us; fear and insecurity determine what we feel and how we act. I don't know what tomorrow's students of history will make of us and our times but I have a feeling that they may not give us particularly high marks if we do not heed these dangerous alarm bells.

And yet, I am absolutely convinced that if we could ask every man, woman and child in the world for their opinion, they would respond, just as so many did in Tahrir Square last year: it is the will of the people that must be the basis of the authority of government. It is the people who must be the source of power.

You and I know that people do not take to the streets or take up arms to replace one form of dictatorship by another. What they demand is a system that brings everyone into the fold and one that enables them to participate in political dialogue to shape their destiny and contribute to building their country's future. This was true in the countries that ignited the Arab spring; first Tunisia, then Egypt and Libya. But this is no less true in Syria and all other countries.

Peace and prosperity will never have a chance if there is no respect for differences in political views or a genuine commitment to using dialogue to end disputes. If there is one lesson we can all draw from the Arab Spring, it must be the critical importance of political diversity on the one hand and dialogue to achieve peace and democracy on the other. Let us work together to make this a reality for people everywhere.

Fellow parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for coming here in such large numbers to Quebec City, and I wish you a promising, enriching and successful Assembly.

Thank you.