



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

130th IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 16 – 20.3.2014

SPEECH BY THE IPU PRESIDENT MR. ABDELWAHAD RADI AT THE OPENING OF THE 130TH IPU ASSEMBLY

Mr. Mark Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva,
Distinguished Speakers of Parliament and leaders of delegations,
Invited guests,
Fellow parliamentarians,

Welcome to Geneva. I am delighted to see so many of you here for the 130th IPU Assembly. This is no ordinary Assembly as you know. We will be commemorating our organization's 125th anniversary as the theme of our General Debate - **The IPU at 125: Renewing our commitment to peace and democracy** - so aptly reflects.

Let us take a walk down memory lane together. None of us in this room today was around when our organization came into being. The IPU was officially founded in Paris in 1889, symbolically the centenary of the French revolution. An Englishman called Randal Cramer and a Frenchman called Frédéric Passy, both members of parliament, held the shared belief that given the chaotic and informal international system, a proper legal order was needed to bring **peace and stability** to the world. The road to such peace, they were convinced, was paved with international treaties aimed at accepting arbitration rather than going to war.

Thus, promoting the concepts of peace and international arbitration, the IPU provided the origins of today's form of institutionalized **multilateral cooperation**. It did so perhaps without even realizing the full reach and scope of its actions, without realizing the depth of its vision.

The IPU advocated the establishment of corresponding institutions at the intergovernmental level, which eventually became known as the **United Nations**. During this early period of history, the IPU did much to promote the idea that peace and stability could be achieved through **negotiation and dialogue, leading to cooperation**. The fact that six Nobel Peace Prize laureates were active members of the IPU before the First World War broke out is ample testimony of this.

As the oldest multilateral organization in the world, we therefore have much to be proud of since our inception 125 years ago. Not only has our membership grown from a handful of European parliaments to 164 Members from every corner of the globe today, but also, we still are the only parliamentary forum with such a global reach. Multilateralism is an entrenched concept today, as evidenced by the proliferation of international organizations, the bulk of which are located right here in Geneva.

IPU conferences as they were known in the past and assemblies as we know them today, have always served to bring parties together around the negotiating table, with the IPU acting as a neutral facilitator of **parliamentary or back door diplomacy**. Even in inter-war periods and times of conflict, the IPU always calls for a peaceful solution to all disputes through **dialogue and negotiation**. In post-conflict periods, it is a firm believer in the value of building peace and **national reconciliation**, with



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parliament at the heart of these efforts. This is the case in Tunisia, where the parliament played a pivotal role in ending the crisis.

My fellow parliamentarians,

What our Founding Fathers had envisioned over a hundred years ago is still as valid and true today as ever before. History has taught us many important lessons over the years, not least that lasting peace and security can only be achieved through **inclusive and participatory processes**, and embodied in a **representative and elected parliament**. From the French Revolution to the Arab Spring, whose aftershocks can still be felt today, there are valuable lessons to be learned about people power. History has taught us that nothing can stand in the way of the will of the people.

When people start feeling downtrodden and oppressed, when they see the nation's wealth plundered and pillaged or filling up only the pockets of the elite, when corruption and impunity are rife, public sentiment spills over. People take to the streets and put their lives on the line in protest. The same is true when they see their basic human rights being violated or when the rights of minorities, women and young people are trampled upon or overlooked. These people need to voice their concerns and demands and you, as their elected representatives, can give them this voice.

My fellow parliamentarians,

The world has experimented with many political systems over the centuries but at the end of the day, there is broad consensus that democracy is the best system we have, albeit far from perfect. For democracy to work, it has to be a home-grown version adapted to national realities. Yet no matter what form or fashion it takes, one thing is clear: **there can be no democracy without parliament and no parliament without democracy**.

In many ways, the IPU has been a laboratory for these political experiments with its Member Parliaments. Our organization has worked tirelessly to disseminate parliamentary culture and knowledge and to build the capacities of parliamentarians to carry out their core functions of law-making, oversight and representation.

It has also encouraged parliaments to adapt to changing times and to bridge the democracy deficit and narrow the distance. The IPU calls for bringing parliaments closer to the people, for parliaments that are more self-critical and parliaments that strive to become better and stronger institutions. The IPU also calls for parliaments to have **more women members** and take their needs and opinions into account.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is only fitting that we gather here today in Geneva – international Geneva – to celebrate our organization's many accomplishments and mark this **watershed moment** in our history. But let us be ever mindful of the long road ahead and the many things we still want to accomplish.

We can hardly say that the world is a safer place than it was 125 years ago. Indeed, with weapons of mass destruction, including **nuclear weapons**, still in existence, we would be fooling no one because no one feels safe.



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Many challenges lie ahead and our Standing Committees will be examining some of them in-depth at this Assembly. I have already mentioned the aspiration of a nuclear-free world. There is also **risk-resilient development**, linked to demographic trends and natural constraints, and **children's rights**, especially the rights of unaccompanied migrant children and preventing their exploitation in times of war and conflict.

We meet at a time when **multilateralism and democracy** are facing very trying times, as evidenced by the emergency item proposals we have received, notably on the situation in the **Central African Republic, Syria and Ukraine**.

My fellow parliamentarians, I urge you not to watch on as mere spectators. It is your duty as elected representatives to take a stance and condemn any situation where the popular will is mercilessly crushed, where government is failing the people. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty.

With this in mind, let us work to make this Assembly memorable for more reasons than one. Let it be a time of celebration for all that we have achieved together over the past 125 years, but let it also serve as a stark reminder of how much more still remains to be done.

On this note, I wish you very fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.