



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Address to the Council of the Federation

Moscow, 18 May 2016

Hon. Speaker of the Council of the Federation, Ms. Valentina Matviyenko,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Special guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure as President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – the world organization of parliaments - to address your august parliament today in this magnificent city of Moscow. The IPU is very proud of the excellent relations it enjoys with the Russian Parliament, which is a long-standing Member of the Organization. Russia joined the IPU in 1897, less than a decade after the IPU was founded, and throughout Russia's varied and rich history, the relationship has been uninterrupted and solid.

The IPU, as you may know, was founded in 1889 by two visionaries – an Englishman called William Randall Cremer and a Frenchman known as Frédéric Passy, both Nobel Peace Prize laureates. Together, they imagined a world where differences between nations could be resolved peacefully, through political dialogue, without resorting to armed conflict. Indeed the IPU was instrumental during the height of the Cold War in facilitating the first meeting between then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev.

Over the decades, the IPU has remained faithful to its core mandate of promoting democracy through strong parliaments working in the service of the people. It is currently fine-tuning its Strategy for 2017-2021 that will serve as a roadmap for its actions in many fields, notably the promotion of parliamentary democracy, rule of law and good governance, peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

Some of you may already know that the IPU is a pioneer in terms of promoting gender equality and women's participation in politics. The Organization has recently embarked on a drive to include youth more in decision-making and encourage young people to engage actively in politics. In fact, the IPU is a fervent advocate of inclusive parliaments that mirror society in all its components – women, young people, indigenous peoples, minorities and disabled persons.

IPU Assemblies continue to serve as a valuable platform for discussing and identifying responses to topical issues on the international agenda such as violence against women, migration and terrorism. These events also provide a neutral space for

bilateral meetings between parliamentary delegations and the promotion of multilateralism. A big part of the IPU's work involves building the capacity of parliaments to perform not only their core functions of law-making, representation and oversight, but also to make them "fit for purpose" for dealing with emerging challenges such as climate change, multilateral trade, disaster risk reduction and the list goes on. This type of action is facilitated by sharing experiences, showcasing best practices and using standards-setting tools developed by the IPU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Thatcher-Gorbachev encounter I referred to earlier is but one of the highlights of the IPU's action over the years in the realm of parliamentary diplomacy. The IPU leadership, as part of its drive to reach out to marginalized constituencies, is focusing on forgotten or protracted conflicts, such as those in Syria, on the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East and other flash points. The IPU continues to engage the Syrian Parliament, which is fully-fledged Member of the IPU, and impress upon it the urgent need to play its role as the elected body of representatives of the Syrian people. The IPU continues to offer its good offices to parties to conflict, serving as an honest broker with no hidden agenda.

The IPU established a Committee on Middle East Questions in 1987 that brings together members of parliament from Israel and Palestine to discuss freely and openly issues affecting them. That Committee has recently expanded its mandate to include the wider region and has adopted a new approach of organizing roundtables aimed at transforming potentially controversial issues such as water into elements of peaceful co-existence. The IPU's Group of Facilitators for Cyprus brings together parliamentarians from Greek- and Turkish- Cypriot political parties in a bid to find common ground. The value of such encounters in the context of backdoor diplomacy cannot be overstated.

Recently, the Russian Parliament has taken on a more prominent role within the Organization. This is perfectly logical given Russia's growing importance on the international arena. Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and a member of the Middle East Quartet. It is also a major in finding a solution to the Syrian crisis. The Chair of the Council of the Federation's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr. Konstantin Kosachev, is now a member of the IPU's Executive Committee – the deliberative governing body of the Organization. He is also a member of its Sub-Committee on Finance so you can rest assured that your roubles are being well spent.

As testimony of Russia's growing role within the IPU, the Speakers of both Houses of the Russian Parliament participated in the 133rd IPU Assembly held in Geneva in October 2015. I had the pleasure of holding bilateral meetings with both of them, who expressed their commitment to the Organization, its work and its values. Mrs. Matviyenko hand-delivered to me an invitation for Russia to host an IPU Assembly in 2017 in St.- Petersburg. I am pleased to inform you that an IPU assessment mission will be in St. Petersburg and Moscow at the end of this month. Based on its findings, you will be able to proceed with the planning and preparation for that mammoth event, pending formal approval by the governing bodies in October 2016.

On behalf of the IPU and its Members, I wish to thank the Parliament and people of Russia for offering to host an IPU Assembly in the historical and stunning city of St. Petersburg next year. I myself will be addressing the opening of the annual session of the 44th plenary session of the CIS Parliamentary Assembly in two days' time. The IPU is pleased to have recently upgraded the status of the CIS PA at the IPU from permanent Observer to Associate Member. We look forward to collaborating even more closely with both the Russian Parliament and the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in future.

The IPU leadership is committed to reaching out to the six geopolitical groups and to regional parliamentary organizations so that the IPU's messages and work can filter down to the regional, local and grass-roots levels. In this context, I welcomed the Final Statement of the First Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries' Parliaments, held in Moscow last month. The theme of the event, "Inter-parliamentary cooperation for the joint prosperity of Eurasian countries in the 21st century" bears testimony to the power of regional groupings to convey the message of the umbrella organization – the IPU – to a limited context. I applaud this initiative and encourage other regions and subregions to follow suit. I also invite the Eurasia Group to take on a more active role within the IPU by taking up elected posts in various IPU bodies.

Fellow parliamentarians,

As you know, the decisions and commitments undertaken by governments at the international level in all of these areas have a very direct impact on citizens and communities. Parliaments can no longer just rubber-stamp the various treaties and conventions entered into by their respective governments. They need to be part of the global process leading up to the adoption of agreements and active partners in translating these international commitments into national realities. They can do so by adopting or amending legislation, allocating related funds and resources, exercising parliamentary oversight and making sure that agreements are implemented.

In 2015, the world saw the adoption of three major transformative agreements through the UN that seek to eradicate poverty and bring social, economic and environmental development on a sustainable path in just 15 years. These are Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Parliaments will need to make sure that there is a national plan in place to support country-specific goals and targets and find effective ways to hold governments to account for their implementation.

For over two decades now, the IPU has been developing a strategic partnership with the United Nations, convening legislators around the main global issues, bringing their voices and perspectives to the deliberations and negotiations at the UN, working with parliaments to enhance implementation of commitments and bringing a parliamentary component to the main global processes. It is our hope at the IPU that through strong and important Members such as the Russian Federation, we will be able to count on your support to strengthen this relationship with the UN.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in very troubled world. The vision of our founding fathers of a peaceful world has alas not yet been realized. Yet I am convinced that parliaments like yours and parliamentarians like you, can make a real difference and be part of the solution through innovative ideas and a genuine desire for peace. As lawmakers, you not only make laws but must above all, uphold the rule of law. The international community is governed by a series of conventions, treaties, UN Security Council resolutions and other legally binding legal instruments. It is especially in time of crisis that we must ensure full respect for these norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Let me conclude with a message of peace. I urge parliaments and parliamentarians everywhere to work towards achieving that vision of peace cherished by the IPU's founders for the good of our people.

Spaseeba. **Спасибо** Thank you.