



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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ADDRESS

**by Mr. Saber H. Chowdhury,
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),
before the Joint Session of the Romanian Parliament
(Bucharest, 18 April 2016)**

Honorable Speakers of Parliament,
Mr. President and Vice-President of the Romanian IPU Group,
Esteemed Government Ministers,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Members of the diplomatic corps,
Special guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour for me to address you in this magnificent chamber today for your solemn joint plenary sitting of Parliament. I bring to you warm greetings from the IPU leadership and the IPU member Parliaments on this special occasion. This sitting coincides with the 125th anniversary of Romania's membership of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Congratulations! This is a real milestone in your country's rich history.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For those of you who might not be familiar with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), allow me to give you a brief overview of our unique Organization. The IPU was founded in 1889 by two visionaries – a Frenchman known as Frédéric Passy and an Englishman called William Randall Cremer, both recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901 and respectively 1903. These two individuals were convinced of the value of political dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. You will agree that their vision is as valid today as it was back then. So you see, the IPU predates the United Nations and even the League of Nations. Your country, Romania, was one of the first Members of the IPU, having joined soon after the Organization's inception, in 1891.

Today, the IPU continues to work for peace, reconciliation, human rights and equality in all its aspects, as well as for effective and inclusive parliaments that reflect and represent women, young people, ethnic

minorities and other segments of society. The IPU is a pioneer in the areas of gender equality and youth representation in politics. It also has a unique mechanism for addressing alleged violations of the human rights of parliamentarians. These values and aspirations are embodied in the IPU's Strategy, which is currently being reviewed to reflect developments on the international arena over the past few years, not least the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On behalf of the IPU, I would like to pay tribute to the longstanding and loyal membership of the Romanian IPU Group and its valuable contribution to the work and development of the IPU over the years. Indeed, your country can boast of many an accomplishment on the international scene: Vespasian Pella is renowned for his work in the inter-War period as a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Council on developing key concepts of international criminal law. Bucharest hosted the 27th IPU Conference in October 1931, bringing together some of the most prominent politicians of the era, including Romania's own Nicolae Iorga and Mihail Sadoveanu. Romania also played a pivotal role in East-West parliamentary talks at the IPU in the 1960s, which led to the Helsinki Process and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which subsequently became known as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

After the fall of communism, Romania hosted a second IPU Conference in Bucharest in 1995, which inter alia adopted a very substantive resolution on "Parliamentary action to fight corruption and the need for international cooperation in this field". Needless to say, this topic is as relevant today as ever before. As part of our on-going efforts at the IPU, we are striving to develop standards and criteria to enhance transparency and accountability of the political process. The second edition of Global Parliamentary Report, to be issued towards the end of this year in cooperation with UNDP, will focus primarily on good practices for parliamentary oversight and accountability.

Given your track record of engagement with the IPU, it is therefore no small coincidence that Romania is hosting a Regional IPU Seminar for Central and Eastern Europe on implementation of the SDGs today and tomorrow. This is actually the third in a series of regional seminars that the Parliament of Romania has been hosting since 2014 in cooperation with the IPU, and I would like to commend Mr. Laszlo Borbely, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, for his leadership in this regard.

Fellow parliamentarians,

We live in an ever smaller and more interdependent world. Global is local, and vice versa. The decisions and commitments undertaken by governments at the international level – be they in connection to trade, climate change, disaster risk reduction or migration – 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 conversation leading up to the adoption of the respective agreements, and they need to be active partners in translating these international commitments into national realities – adopting or amending legislation, allocating related funds and resources, exercising the parliamentary oversight role and making sure that our agreements are acted upon.

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 basically accompanying the main global processes with a parliamentary component.

In 2015, the world has seen 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. Given how pivotal the SDGs were going to be, very early on the IPU began to organize a parliamentary input to the UN so that the goals would include the views of parliamentarians. The perspectives of parliaments and parliamentarians from across the globe have indeed enriched the formulation and articulation of the SDGs and the IPU is proud to have contributed to this process.

In collaboration with other partners, we helped secure the governance goal (Goal 16), which among other things calls for more accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. We also gave a boost to goal 5 on gender equality, and goal 10 on inequalities within and between countries. The critical role and responsibility of parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs were also recognized in the Political Declaration accompanying the Goals.

So what is expected of parliaments in terms of carrying forward the SDGs? The first order of business is making sure that there is political will to implement the SDGs in their countries. Today, you will be adopting a

parliamentary Declaration on the SDGs which is not only a clear sign of strong political will but also an action-oriented roadmap. You are one of the first countries taking this step and I congratulate you for your leadership. I will be pleased to bring the Declaration to the attention of the IPU membership at the next IPU Assembly in October in Geneva.

The next step in implementation of the SDGs is making sure that each parliament is “fit for purpose”. The broad outline of this can be put in four points: one, “domesticate” the global goals so that you clearly identify which within each goal speaks to your countries’ concerns; two, make sure that there is a national plan in place to support country-specific goals and targets; three, find effective ways to hold governments to account for the implementation of national plans; and last but not least, make sure your constituents are familiar with the national plans for the goals and are consulted regularly with regard to their implementation.

To be able to do all this, each parliament will need to evaluate its own institutional processes. How will you be able to institutionalize the goals so as to capture the synergies and build coherence at the policy level?

In order to assist parliaments in this important effort, the IPU is developing a Self-Assessment Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to assist parliaments and parliamentarians to identify whether they are equipped in terms of institutional processes and capacities to do their part in implementing the SDGs, and to identify what can be done in addition to enable parliamentarians to most effectively engage in and support SDG implementation. It has been designed to be relevant to all parliaments, whatever political system they adhere to, whatever their stage of development. I encourage you to use the toolkit and to continue to share your experiences with other parliaments through the IPU.

Fellow parliamentarians,

Looking more broadly at the complex challenges facing our world today, we cannot underestimate the value of parliamentary diplomacy. Time and time again, we have seen how parliamentary cooperation can serve as a laboratory for innovative ideas and solutions. As I mentioned earlier, it was parliamentarians from the East and the West, meeting at the IPU in the 1960s at the height of the Cold War, who initiated the process on security and cooperation in Europe. It was MPs and political representatives from both the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus that helped open a political dialogue on the island. And it was parliamentarians who first drew international attention to the widespread and devastating harm caused by anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, passing national legislation categorically prohibiting these

weapons of terror, and ultimately paving the way for the 1997 global Mine Ban Treaty and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

We are first and foremost the representatives of the people, and we must never tire in listening to their grievances and working to meet their expectations. We must lead by example and strive to meet our electoral commitments. We cannot be immune to the growing disenchantment of young people with politics; we must persevere in rejuvenating democracy and giving voice to youth. At the IPU very recently all our member Parliaments engaged in a thought-provoking general debate on the moral and economic imperative for a smarter, fairer and more humane migration. We have identified good practices and some very specific solutions on which we can work together. Violent extremism is a risk and a danger for all of our communities, nobody is immune – we must courageously tackle its root causes and never sway from preserving human rights, human dignity and fundamental freedoms.

So fellow parliamentarians, as we continue to work for the good of our people, let us put some humanity back into politics and practise what we preach: tolerance, inclusiveness and solidarity. Let us continue to strive for a better life for all.

To the Parliament and people of Romania, I wish you memorable celebrations. You have much to be proud of. We at the IPU are pleased to be part of these celebrations. The anniversary publication you have produced and the special stamp you have issued will be a tangible reminder of your history and of your contribution to History.

Thank you.