



# **Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies**

Doha (Qatar), 29 October – 1 November 2006

## **Declaration**

We, members of parliament, meeting in Doha on the occasion of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, hereby adopt the following Declaration:

- i. *Having discussed* at length the contribution of parliaments to democracy and *reaffirming* the central role of dialogue, tolerance and freedom of expression in democracy,
- ii. *Reiterating* our commitment to the Declaration adopted by the Parliamentary Forum on the occasion of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies held in Ulaanbaatar in September 2003,
- iii. *Reaffirming* the fundamental principles and values of democracy, which are freedom, participation, human rights and the rule of law, principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and *reaffirming* the continued validity of that Declaration,
- iv. *Convinced* that while democracy has to take into account the specific context of each society, the above-mentioned principles and values are universal in scope and are therefore non-negotiable,
- v. *Reiterating* the central role of parliament in the promotion of democracy, since parliament, as the freely-elected body of representatives of the people, expresses their will and articulates their interests in order to guarantee their welfare. In this connection, *reaffirming* that democracy goes hand in hand with human rights and development, and that it must contribute to the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable human development for all,
- vi. *Affirming* that democracy can only thrive in an atmosphere of tolerance and dialogue where there is mutual respect for each other's opinions and values; and that parliament must play its role as the crucible for the mediation of the conflicting interests of society, the resolution of conflicts and the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation,
- vii. *Reiterating* the need to ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and representative and that all sectors of society, especially women, have a reasonable opportunity to participate and make their opinions known. In this context, *stressing* the particular importance of ensuring genuine participation of both men and women in political processes and the need to involve opposition parties, youth, disadvantaged groups as well as people with disabilities in the governance process,
- viii. *Considering* that parliaments should play their role as guardians of human rights and strive to ensure that public policies are respectful of these rights. For parliaments to be effective in this regard, it is important that the rights of their individual members are protected from arbitrariness,
- ix. *Noting* the substantial progress made around the world towards achieving democracy and building a culture of democracy, *welcoming* these developments, especially in the Arab region, *encouraging* further progress, and *pledging* to work together to foster a culture in which everyone enjoys the right and freedom to participate in the management of the affairs of their

society,

- x. *Gravely concerned* at the spread of various threats to human security, including terrorism, which subvert democracy worldwide, *undertaking* to contribute actively towards efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of terrorism, and *stressing* that the military response to terrorism is inadequate, and that governments should adopt and implement policies that foster dialogue and encourage the participation of all, especially marginalized groups, in mainstream political processes. *Also condemning* all forms of human rights abuses in the name of combating terrorism, and *reaffirming* that freedom of speech must not be used to propagate hate speech and fuel conflict,
- xi. *Emphasizing* that the security sector, including the police and armed forces, should be under civilian control and should operate in a transparent and accountable manner, and *reiterating* the role and duty that parliaments have to oversee the operations of these forces in order to ensure accountability and protect citizens from abuse,
- xii. *Further emphasizing* that for the institutions of governance to serve the interests of the people, they must devise mechanisms to keep in touch with the people. For parliaments, this means that parliamentarians should devise various ways, including effective constituency outreach and public hearings, not only to inform the people on parliament's work, but also to encourage their inputs into parliamentary proceedings,
- xiii. *Mindful* that the media and civil society also play a crucial role in ensuring that governance processes are democratic, open and accountable, and *undertaking* to establish and/or strengthen legislative frameworks that allow for effective inputs by civil society in the work of governing institutions, especially parliaments. Adequate space has to be given to the media to inform the national community of public policies and action with a view to greater transparency and accountability. In this respect, *stressing* the need for the adoption of freedom of information legislation in our various countries, and *encouraging* the media to perform their function in a responsible manner and to refrain from serving as a conduit for the spread of values that run counter to democracy,
- xiv. *Recognizing* that information and communication technologies are increasingly contributing to the development of governance processes that are both open and effective, and *encouraging* the harnessing of the potential offered by these technologies in order to improve service delivery and open access by the people to political processes,
- xv. *Reaffirming* that parliaments must also play a strong role in bridging the democracy gap in international relations. This means that parliaments should monitor international negotiations, monitor enforcement of decisions adopted by governments at the international level and ensure compliance with international norms and the rule of law. Parliaments must also scrutinize effectively the activities of international organizations and provide inputs into their deliberations,

- xvi. *Recognizing* that for parliaments to play their role effectively, a number of basic conditions have to be met:
- They should be properly empowered through constitutional and other legal frameworks;
  - They should be representative of all citizens and include representatives from all sectors of society;
  - Their members should be able to express themselves and act independently - free from arbitrary constraints;
  - They must be sufficiently informed of the issues on which they are called upon to take decisions;
  - They must have sufficient resources, both human and material. In this context, the importance of financial and administrative autonomy for parliaments cannot be overemphasized. They should have an independent budget and staff and should manage these resources according to the strictest standards of integrity and accountability;
1. *Pledge* to abide by the principles set forth in the present Declaration and, in particular, the principles of dialogue, tolerance and freedom of expression as fundamental cornerstones of democracy.
  2. *Undertake* to work for a more effective contribution of our parliaments to democracy worldwide. In this connection, *cognizant* of the need for our parliaments to be more representative, accessible, accountable and transparent, and the need to devise or strengthen internal procedures and mechanisms that make our parliaments more effective nationally and internationally, *congratulate* the Inter-Parliamentary Union on action taken to follow up on the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, notably the publication of the guide on *Parliament and democracy in the twentieth century: A guide to good practice*; *undertake* to be inspired by the good practices identified in this publication in our bid to make our parliaments evermore effective;
  3. *Note* that parliaments, especially those in the new and emerging democracies, need assistance in meeting the challenges mentioned above, *encourage* therefore donors to continue to support capacity-building programmes for these parliaments, *stress* the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation as a means of fostering the exchange of experiences and good practices, and *encourage* the IPU to continue its efforts to strengthen parliaments as pillars of democracy and to take the lead in coordinating information on such assistance in order to encourage synergies and avoid overlapping;
  4. *Pledge* our parliaments' determination to continue working together, *offer* mutual assistance in coping with our common challenges, and *undertake* to continue to engage with governments, international organizations and civil society in our common endeavour to promote democracy;
  5. *Express our thanks* to the Government and the Advisory Council of the State of Qatar for organizing this Parliamentary Meeting, and *further thank* the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union for their substantive contribution to the organization and conduct of the Meeting;

6. *Request* the Speaker of the Advisory Council to convey the present Declaration to the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to convey it to the appropriate authorities as part of the official proceedings of the Conference;
7. *Request* that this Declaration be brought to the attention of all Speakers of parliaments and *encourage* them to take steps towards its implementation;
8. *Decide* to follow up on the present Declaration by taking the measures outlined in the Plan of Action.