



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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## **Speech to the Opening Ceremony of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies**

**Mr. Anders B. Johnsson**

Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

29 October 2006

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, its President Pier Ferdinando Casini and the world community of parliaments, to extend greetings to you all on the occasion of the opening of this prestigious conference. Let me also thank our hosts, his Highness the Emir, the Government and people of the State of Qatar, for the excellent arrangements they have made in organizing this event.

The IPU welcomes the opportunity offered by this conference to take stock of the efforts made by the world community of nations, both individually and collectively, to advance the democracy agenda and also to chart the path for the future.

During this conference and for the second time only in the 18-year history of the ICNRD movement, we are organizing a Parliamentary Forum. Needless to say, the IPU as the global institution of parliaments welcomes the increasing involvement of parliaments and their members in the global effort to make our societies more democratic. I wish to record our appreciation for the partnership that we have developed with the Advisory Council of the State of Qatar and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union in preparing for the Forum

In any state, democratic principles and values are realised through a complex set of institutions and practices, which have evolved over time and continue to do so. Parliament stands at the centre of that complex and is a central, if not the central, institution of democracy.

Yet, parliaments in many countries, and that certainly includes many emerging democracies, have to grapple with a crisis of confidence and legitimacy. The executive branch dominates the agenda, international cooperation and globalisation have led to decision making that lacks democratic control, and people question whether current political processes are really able to produce institutions that can represent their interests in all their diversity.

How best can parliaments translate people's aspirations into policies that benefit them? How should members of parliaments conduct themselves so as to inspire public confidence? Do in fact parliaments and their members have the necessary resources to perform their duties in an efficient and unhindered manner? And while the international community has long since accepted and acted upon the notion that an elected parliament constitutes an essential stepping stone for countries emerging from conflict, there remains a lot of work to understand fully how best parliaments can contribute effectively to conflict resolution and reconciliation. These are of some of the questions participants will be addressing over the coming days. We look forward to learning how parliaments and States in general, are coping with these challenges.

As part of our work over the last three years to follow up on the Fifth Conference on New or Restored Democracies in Mongolia, the IPU has produced a guide to good practice in parliaments. The study, which is based on the input from seventy-five parliaments in all regions of the world, including a great many in new or restored democracies, seeks to answer the question what we mean by a democratic parliament. The guide answers by offering five key characteristics which every

parliament should have – representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

Every country and democracy will need to establish its own democratic institutions based on its own history and traditions and the IPU does not advocate a single model. Yet, we are convinced that the content of this guide, enriched by the discussions that will take place in the coming days here in Doha, can serve as inspiration for many countries throughout the world.

Mr. Chairman, you will excuse me if I take this opportunity to suggest that we examine in particular one of the five key characteristics of parliament, namely representation. How can we ensure that parliaments are representative not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the quality of that representation?

As I speak to you today, only one out of every six parliamentarians in the world is a woman. The situation is changing for the better but far too slowly and it would seem high time to focus more energetically on this issue to ensure a more equitable representation and participation of women in governance processes. Just as any person with two legs will naturally use both to advance, surely societies everywhere should make the best use of all their human resources in order to design and implement policies that are consonant with the needs and interests of all.

The IPU is following with keen interest developments in the Arab world where democratic gains have been achieved in recent years and we welcome and encourage these developments. It is universally recognised that democracy is not a finite state, but needs to be constantly nurtured and perfected. It is thus incumbent

upon us, the international community, to continue to lend our substantive support to the efforts being deployed in the region to further the democracy agenda, it being understood that democracy cannot and should not be imposed. The Inter-Parliamentary Union promises to continue to proffer its modest contribution to efforts in this regard.

We are therefore looking forward to the discussions at this conference. We earnestly hope that we can together identify innovative strategies for implementing a common vision for the development of democracy, especially in those parts of the world where democracy is still fragile.

Mr. Chairman,

The international community should be congratulated for pursuing a tripartite approach for this Conference, a practice that was initiated in Mongolia. Governments, parliaments and civil society have something distinct and equally valuable to contribute to the edifice of democracy. The IPU believes that we should do everything possible to preserve the partnership we have been building over these last three years while respecting the specific nature, mandate and prerogatives of each partner.

It is our hope that this Conference will not only lead to in-depth reflection and soul-searching on democracy, but also help us establish a clear and well charted roadmap for our joint endeavour to promote democracy over the coming three years to the next Conference. It seems to us that that endeavour could also be enhanced by

establishing synergies with other democracy movements in the world and thus creating a global coalition for democracy.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you very successful deliberations.