



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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## **Address by Mr. Mian Raza Rabbani Member of the Senate of Pakistan Member of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**Regional seminar for Asia-Pacific parliaments on *Translating international human rights commitments into national realities: the contribution of parliaments to the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council*  
Manila, 26-27 February 2015**

The President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Saber Chowdhury, has asked me to welcome all of you to Manila and to thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to participate in this important seminar. I would like to thank the President of the Senate, Mr. Franklin M. Drilon, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Feliciano Belmonte Jr. for agreeing to host this meeting and for giving their full political support to help ensure its success. I would like to express my gratitude to Sen. Aquilino 'Koko' Pimentel and his team for the arrangements they have put in place to allow us to come together in such excellent conditions. I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the contribution of our long-standing partner, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with which we share a common belief about the responsibility that falls to parliaments to promote and protect human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Parliament's mandate of legislating and ensuring government's accountability is of the utmost importance when it comes to translating international human rights standards into national action. Indeed, without parliamentary action, be it at the legislative or oversight levels, few of the recommendations that are produced by the United Nations human rights mechanisms will be implemented.

In recent years, the IPU has attached particular importance to the need for stronger synergies between parliaments and the UN Human Rights Council to ensure better enjoyment of human rights for citizens at the national level.

The IPU has argued that human rights are not technical matters and

that they often require tough political discussions and decisions. The IPU has underscored that rather than try to keep the politics out, it is important to embrace the political process for what it is. Indeed, parliaments can help promote public debate on human rights, seek input from all segments of society, lend democratic legitimacy to the outcome of that debate and galvanize public support for implementation.

Drawing on those arguments, the IPU organized several meetings to sensitize the diplomatic community to the importance of enhanced parliamentary involvement in the work of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review.

It is in this context that the IPU has organized, in close collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a number of regional capacity-building events for parliamentarians. The most recent meeting designed for parliamentarians from the African continent took place in Rabat last year.

Its outcome reinforced the message that once parliaments know about the Council and its UPR they are very keen to contribute. I am confident that through today's seminar we can also mobilize parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region to engage more with the Council.

Ladies and gentlemen,

How we address human rights challenges in the coming decades will be deeply influenced by the outcome of the ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda. The IPU is firmly convinced that human rights and democracy must be an essential part of the new sustainable development goals that will be adopted at the end of this year.

Indeed, at the policy level, States' human rights obligations imply a shared responsibility between governments as initiators and implementers of policy, and parliaments as law-making and oversight bodies. Giving effect to this shared responsibility should ensure respect for people's basic rights and development outcomes that are up to the highest standards in terms of quality and fairness for all, without discrimination.

Implementation of these ideals, combined with the concept of shared responsibility, requires that the sustainable development goals are shaped from a human rights-based perspective and that they promote

strong State institutions to ensure effectively delivery.

The IPU is committed to such a development agenda that puts people and their rights first with the help of effective institutions, such as parliaments, and will therefore continue to engage for this purpose with its Member Parliaments and other stakeholders in the remaining stages of the negotiations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IPU believes that parliaments can make a critical contribution to the promotion of human rights but can only do so effectively when they work in partnership with other human right stakeholders and when strong national human rights protection systems are in place.

The IPU therefore helps to promote close cooperation between parliaments and other national human rights partners, in particular national human rights institutions and civil society organizations, in the belief that they all stand much to gain from such cooperation.

Whether you are an MP, a Minister, a Human Rights Commissioner or a human rights activist, what unites us is our shared desire and pursuit to uphold and preserve the dignity and fundamental rights of citizens everywhere. It is therefore in our collective interest to reach out to each other and to join hands so that we can truly make a difference.

I also wish to use this occasion to place on record the IPU's profound gratitude for the financial support that the Japanese organization Worldwide Support for Development has given to make this meeting possible.

Thank you.