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## **IPU PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL SPEECH AT THE ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY HEARING 2007**

Good morning.

I hereby call to order the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations on the occasion of the sixty-second session here in New York. We are honoured by the presence of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and the President of the General Assembly, the Honourable Srgjan Kerim.

We attach particular importance to this hearing because it is the first that we are organizing as a joint UN-IPU event. The first formal communication relating to this event was addressed to speakers of parliaments a few months ago, in the form of a letter co-signed by myself and the President of the United Nations General Assembly, and I am pleased to see such a positive response to our initiative. Let me underscore that the presence this morning of the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, together, offers a powerful confirmation of the importance we all attach to the growing cooperation and partnership between the United Nations and the world of parliaments.

Our event also has a very solid substantive significance. We have moved away from an event organized solely by the IPU in the margin of the General Assembly towards a hearing that is more attuned to the work and agenda of the General Assembly, and that will hopefully feed directly into its substantive discussions. I look forward to helping make this parliamentary hearing a truly integral part of the work of the United Nations and, as such, providing greater political input and support in delivering on the major international commitments of our day.

This annual meeting will offer all of us an opportunity to examine the role that parliaments can play to reinforce the rule of law in international relations. We will be talking about the rule of law as it applies to three critical items on today's international agenda: disarmament and non-proliferation; the international tribunals and the criminal justice regime and thirdly, the global approach to counter terrorism.

While we all recognize the rule of law as a foundation of peace and democracy, we must also recognize the strains that exist in its application. This is most clearly seen when it comes to disarmament and in particular to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The great bargain whereby nuclear weapons states would forfeit those deadly weapons while the rest

of the world would abstain from seeking those weapons has all but come to naught. Yet when we talk to our constituents in virtually every country we hear an overwhelming desire for peaceful coexistence with others. There seems to be a disconnect between the decisions taken at the "top" and the real mood of the people down "below" that we politicians and diplomats must find a way to overcome.

The international criminal justice regime is also severely under strain. Is it possible to adequately investigate and prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and other such acts? Resources aside, a problem besetting these tribunals seems to be one of understanding about their role and their mandate, particularly against the backdrop of national sovereignty. We must also face the reality that in many countries political considerations may lead to a more lenient treatment of those involved in fallen military regimes of one form or another, for the sake of long-term peace and national reconciliation. But is this last consideration a legitimate one?

Much has been said about the fight against terrorism in these halls and in those of the IPU in recent years, but here too we are not seeing sufficient action to implement adopted commitments. Some of us seem to have been bogged down with questions of definition or, worse still, have used terrorism as a wedge issue to try to address various other grievances. Our proposal at this meeting, as shown in the annotated agenda, is to set aside the politics for a moment and instead focus on the practical work we can all do together to implement existing commitments such as the United Nations global counter-terrorism strategy.

In our deliberations today and tomorrow, we will be assisted by a number of distinguished discussants from parliaments, governments, the United Nations system, academia and non-governmental organizations. Each session will feature a moderator who will help us keep the discussion flowing but focused. I must remind all of you that the Hearing is designed as an informal exchange of views and that therefore interventions should not be from prepared statements. If delegates wish to share more formal statements, they can do so by placing sufficient copies on the side counter. A summary report of the meeting will be issued in January and circulated to parliaments as well as to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Before entering the subject matter of this hearing, we are fortunate enough to have an opportunity to interact with two senior Under Secretaries General for Political Affairs and Legal Affairs. They will brief us on the priorities, challenges and objectives of the new United Nations management team. We will have ample opportunities to raise questions, as we are accustomed to do in parliamentary debates, and to discuss with them how parliaments can best act in support of the United Nations.

We have a very busy programme before us, and I would like without further ado to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly for his opening remarks.

You have the floor, sir.