



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

High-Level Stakeholders Consultation on the Implementation of the Sierra Leone
Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework

Statement by Ambassador Anda Filip
Permanent Observer

United Nations
New York, 19 May 2008

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

I am pleased to address this thematic plenary meeting on **Good Governance and Capacity Building in relation to the implementation of the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework**. As you have very correctly pointed out, democratic governance and the strengthening of national institutions are vital to achieving lasting peace in Sierra Leone. In this context, we would argue – as we have on various past occasions - that Parliament, as one of the institutions at the heart of governance, plays a key role in the peace building process.

As far as the Inter-Parliamentary Union is concerned, we have striven to support the efforts of the PBC in Burundi and Sierra Leone. We have engaged the leadership of the parliament in both countries in initiatives to promote dialogue and ensure that decision-making is as inclusive as possible. Indeed, we can not over-emphasize the importance of parliament as the crucible of national reconciliation wherein the divergent interests of society are debated and mediated. This role is of paramount importance in a post-conflict environment.

The Secretary-General's latest report on the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone, while highlighting progress in supporting the Government to consolidate peace in the country, also draws attention to the fact that unresolved political tensions -alongside ethnic and regional lines- have the potential to derail the peace consolidation process. We need to work together to ensure that the representatives of the people rise above ethnic and political party divisions, in favour of the general interest.

In October of last year, the IPU, in cooperation with UNIOSIL and UNDP, conducted an assessment mission to review the functioning of Sierra Leone parliament and develop a comprehensive proposal to assist that parliament in consolidating its capacity to discharge the constitutional prerogatives it has been invested with. The conclusions and recommendations of the mission, endorsed by the leadership in parliament, have been shared with you and the Peace Building Support Office, and we look forward to moving to the operational stage of mobilizing funds and implementing a meaningful technical assistance program for the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

As you are aware, the parliamentary elections held in July 2007 gave birth to a multi-party parliament. The parliament faces daunting challenges to surmount if it has to play a meaningful role and meet the aspirations of the people. It comprises many well-educated and dynamic members, including 16 women MPs. Nonetheless, 80% of the current members of parliament are first time parliamentarians, and they are in need of urgent support in order to come to grips with the nuts and bolts of a functioning parliament. .

One simple example is the need to provide specialized capacity building to enhance new Members' understanding of the standing orders of parliament which will lead to fuller participation and engagement by this new generation of leaders. Many of the returning Members also need support in a variety of ways, such as providing capacity development support for legal drafting, research and analysis.

Induction training on legislative, representation and oversight functions is required. Training in budgeting and financial appropriations is important in order to gain the financial autonomy that parliament requires in order to determine and pass its own budget. Committee work should be better structured and supported, and the office of the Clerk will require assistance in the implementation of the Parliamentary Services Act – which includes development of human resource policies, review of departmental staffing needs, and an assessment of current staff skills.

We at IPU will do what we can to assist, but the parliament in Sierra Leone also very much needs the firm commitment from you – the United Nations in general and Peacebuilding Commission and Fund, in particular. I mention this because, still, there is a tendency to neglect this fundamental institution of governance. We see that, all too often, the “government” is limited to the Executive. The other arm, the judiciary is clearly identified. Parliament isn’t. It is usually lumped together with civil society, whereas in fact it should be identified and treated as a key institution of good governance.

If national reconciliation is to succeed, then parliament will need to be that place where the various segments and interests in society come together for peaceful discussions, mediation and decisions on how to take the country forward. It is important that in seeking to consolidate peace in Sierra Leone, one does not end up with a strong executive and a weak parliament. A strong parliament is in the national interest – to consolidate national reconciliation, to build national ownership around international commitments and ultimately – as in any viable democracy - to hold the executive to account and oversee the effective and efficient delivery of development aid.

Mr. President,

The IPU has just launched a project to support post-conflict Parliaments in Africa in promoting reconciliation. In view of what I have just said about the role of the Sierra Leone Parliament, I am pleased to say that it will obviously be one of the parliaments that will be benefiting from this project, which will assist the parliaments concerned in addressing the wounds of the past and building viable societies. The project will provide a venue wherein the parliament will share experiences with other parliaments such as those of Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda, Somalia and Sudan. It will also help these parliaments to establish, monitor, assess and provide follow-up to the work of transitional justice mechanisms, while strengthening inclusive political processes. We will be pleased to keep you regularly informed of results, findings and recommendations as this process evolves.

Thank you for your attention.