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STATEMENT

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General Assembly Agenda item 12 :
Support by the United Nations system of efforts of Governments to promote
and consolidate new or restored democracies

New York, 5 November 2007

Mr. President,

It gives me great pleasure to address the General Assembly on the occasion of this debate on Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.

At the outset, I wish to commend the efforts of the State of Qatar to ensure systematic follow-up to the recommendations of the 6th International Conference of New or Restored Democracies. As you all know, the tripartite format of that conference, like the previous one in Mongolia in 2003, allowed for fruitful interaction between governments, parliaments and civil society, with a view to an integrated and all-encompassing approach to democracy promotion worldwide. At the conference, members of parliament undertook to work for a more effective contribution of their parliaments to democracy worldwide. The IPU is pleased to be part of that process and we remain committed to following up on the Doha Declaration, including its parliamentary component. We will continue to mobilize the global parliamentary community in support of democracy at both the national and international levels.

As we embark on this debate, let me also express IPU's support for the draft resolution that is before the General Assembly today. We are pleased to note the important place it gives to parliaments as key instruments of democracy. It is also gratifying to see that it calls for the institution of an International Day of Democracy. Let me assure you that the IPU, in turn, will be calling upon its member parliaments to celebrate this day accordingly. Indeed, we are convinced that such a day will help to forge a global alliance in favour of the guiding principles of democracy and provide added momentum for democracy-related activities.

Let me now offer a few thoughts that I hope will not only enrich the debate but will also help us, notably within the UN system, to devise strategies whereby we can deliver more effectively in the field of democracy. In this regard, I would like to stress the necessary linkage between peace and democracy. The United Nations, as the foremost international body dedicated to the promotion of peace, has an interest in pursuing and realizing the goals of democracy as a means of establishing a durable basis for peace. When we talk of peace, we are also looking at the prevention of conflict. The IPU would like to see more consistent efforts being deployed to post-conflict institution building. Peace can only be fully realized when State institutions are properly empowered and resourced to contribute to the rule of law and good governance.

We are particularly heartened by ongoing work deployed by the new UN Peacebuilding Commission in support of post-conflict societies in Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Needless to say, we look forward to the expansion of these efforts to other areas affected by conflict.

I also wish to emphasize the link between democracy, poverty eradication and social justice. Democracy would be worthless if it did not lead to the betterment of the lives of people for whom it is meant. Conversely, it is hard for the poor to become active politically when they have more pressing concerns to attend to. Freedom from want should therefore underpin efforts to enhance democracy. This includes devising policies that are intended to improve on the well-being of all in society and enhanced efforts toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – for which the IPU is increasingly mobilizing support in the parliamentary community.

As we reflect on how to foster democracy worldwide, especially in those regions where democracy is still fragile, we should acknowledge and address some of the fundamental challenges facing democracy today. We know some of the downsides of globalization. We are aware of the emergence of terrorism as a major scourge and threat. We are conversant of the effects of rampant corruption on democratic processes in many countries. And we know all too well the reasons why only 17 per cent of women worldwide occupy elected office. These are all obstacles we need to overcome as we seek to build robust democracies.

Furthermore, we are witnessing general public disillusionment with democracy as evidenced, among other things, by low turnout in elections around the world and the continuing decline in public regard for governing institutions. It seems to us that the UN should be devoting more efforts, over the coming years, in analyzing this phenomenon and in trying to reverse this trend. More effort needs to go into building stronger and more effective public institutions, notably those that are responsible for organizing elections in new democracies. The credibility of these institutions rests on their ability to organize elections whose outcome is above reproach and accepted by all. Going beyond the representational aspects of democracy, the international community must also work harder to build the capacities of people to participate in the political process between elections.

As the world organization of parliaments, the IPU will continue to work with parliaments with a view to rendering them more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective. The IPU will also continue to defend the rights of those many members of parliament around the world who are prevented from doing the job they were elected to do, freely, safely and effectively. And we will seek to promote parliaments as prime movers of national reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

The IPU will therefore continue its efforts to build capacity within parliaments, promote the political participation of women, defend and promote human rights and also contribute to the setting of internationally accepted standards in the field of democracy. In building strong institutions, we should seek to harness the enormous potential offered by the new information and communications technologies to streamline processes but also to improve on service delivery.

Let me conclude by drawing your attention to the *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, adopted by consensus on the occasion of the 98th Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Cairo, Egypt, in September 1997, and whose 10th anniversary the IPU celebrated very recently. It is meaningful, we believe, that the International Day of Democracy has been chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy. The precepts and principles enshrined in this important political document are as valid today as ever before, and we invite the United Nations and its member States to more systematically integrate these core principles into their efforts to strengthen democracy.

In sum, the IPU is committed to working closely with the United Nations to promote a culture of democracy worldwide. Thank you.