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General Assembly

Agenda item 10:
Report of the Peacebuilding Commission

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United Nations
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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have been given this opportunity to address the General Assembly on agenda item 10 as it relates to the second annual Report of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Let me, at the outset, commend the PBC for its strong contribution to the revival of countries emerging from conflict. Its much needed assistance in stabilizing and strengthening governing institutions and, in so doing, enhancing their capacity to sustain peace, is greatly appreciated.

I am pleased to point out that since its inception, the PBC and the IPU have enjoyed close cooperation, especially in the context of strengthening the role and capacity of parliaments to contribute to peace processes. The IPU looks forward to pursuing this cooperation with the PBC.

It is self-evident why the international community should continue to include parliaments in efforts to bring peace and stability to conflict-prone societies. Indeed, its role in articulating and mediating between the divergent interests of society contribute in no small way to helping transform a society from conflict to sustainable peace. A key challenge for the international community is to ensure that parliaments in post-conflict societies, which like other governing institutions, are weak or have been undermined by the conflict, can be resuscitated and given the means with which to perform their functions effectively. The fact that such parliaments are often composed of the very same actors who have been party to the conflict makes a particularly strong case for continued efforts by the international community to promote dialogue and a culture of tolerance. It is the IPU's hope that the PBC will continue to pay particular attention to this major challenge.

The IPU, for its part, is committed to pursuing its support to parliaments in post-conflict countries. In June this year, it launched a far-reaching project which aims to strengthen the role of parliaments in English-speaking African countries in promoting inclusive political processes, institutional reform and reconciliation. Parliaments benefiting from this support include Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. Zimbabwe will hopefully join the list. It is heartening to note that the UN has been actively involved in the peace processes of most of these countries.

The project brought together MPs from these countries at a regional seminar in Sierra Leone to discuss issues that parliaments should factor into their strategies for promoting national peace building and reconciliation processes. They included transitional justice mechanisms, the establishment of appropriate reparation policies, the role of women, the controversial issue of amnesties, the pursuit of justice, including national versus international courts, security sector reform and many more. The experiences shared at the seminar highlighted the potential parliament has to bring people closer and which, if managed well, can be an important vehicle

for political mediation and action and for the equitable allocation of resources to address the needs of the population. Participants came away with the strong conviction that reconciliation was not an event but rather a healing process that affects the lives of several generations and that perseverance was essential in this process. In our view, this is a key point that we the international community should factor into our efforts. The IPU intends to build on this project to assist participating parliaments in preparing and implementing roadmaps for their own involvement at the national level.

Also, in June of this year, the IPU in cooperation with the PBC organized a panel discussion in New York on *Parliaments, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*, which brought forth relevant experiences from Burundi, Central America and South Africa. The debate touched on a number of aspects and challenges, including the role of former combatants, financing of political parties, and the need for the international community to assist in developing a culture of shared responsibilities among minority and majority political parties. The meeting helped identify lessons learned and good practices, as well as pinpoint practical ways to implement those good practices.

Needless to say, the IPU has been keen and pleased to proffer support to PBC efforts at the national level, especially in Burundi and Sierra Leone. In Burundi, the IPU has been actively engaged with the parliament to assist it in promoting dialogue and establishing mechanisms that promote inclusiveness in decision-making. It has also continued to provide assistance to women parliamentarians in order to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to parliamentary processes.

In Sierra, Leone, at the request of the PBC, the IPU carried out a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the parliament in October 2007. This assessment was done in cooperation with UNIOSIL and UNDP. The challenges facing the parliament are typically inherent to a post-conflict environment. The wounds of conflict are yet to be completely healed and Sierra Leone remains a fragile and volatile society. The parliament faces the daunting task of putting the pieces of Sierra Leone society back together. National reconciliation and transitional justice will therefore continue to be at the top of the agenda. The IPU, in cooperation with UNDP, intends to build on this assessment to identify specific interventions that will enable the parliament to come to grips with these challenges.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that parliament is a complex institution whose potential to deliver is not always guaranteed. Therefore, the challenge for the international community is to take cognizance of parliament's role and complexity and to nurture its full capacity. In this regard, we are pleased that the Commission has continued to place high on its agenda the needs of democratically elected parliaments. For our part, we will continue to raise awareness of the work of the Commission among our members along the lines indicated in the report.

Thank you.