



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Joint Debate on the Strengthening of the United Nations system [120] and Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit [114]

STATEMENT by Speaker Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the IPU
United Nations General Assembly, 16 November 2009

Mr. President,

I am pleased to address the General Assembly at this joint debate on the strengthening of the United Nations system and the follow-up to the Millennium Summit. I address you today as the Speaker of the Parliament of Namibia and the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Over the past several years, the IPU and the United Nations have been building a strategic partnership in pursuit of world peace, development, democracy and human rights. I am proud to recall that a first crucial step in this direction was taken on the occasion of the Millennium Summit, the preparations for which I had the honor to preside over almost a decade ago. Looking back, I think we can agree that important progress has been made, as you yourself have confirmed through successive resolutions of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Two years ago, in the fall of 2007, the General Assembly received an IPU policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments. Essentially, we view this as a partnership that needs to be firmly rooted in the activities that parliaments carry out at home. The partnership includes action by parliaments to contribute to and monitor international negotiations and debates at the UN, and to ensure national compliance with international norms and the rule of law. It also involves scrutinizing the activities of the United Nations and contributing to its deliberations.

The IPU is convinced that members of parliament can play a critical part in building national ownership and political support for international action. In IPU's view, which is shared by many UN member States, the United Nations stands to gain considerably by making sure that parliaments and their members have a full and undistorted understanding of what is done at the United Nations.

This is the purpose of the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, which you have endorsed as a joint UN-IPU event and whose outcome report is circulated to both parliaments and UN member States. This year's Hearing takes place later this week. It will focus on the international response to the global economic crisis. It will bring together legislators from around the world to interact with you and the broader UN community, and we encourage you all to participate.

Like you, we are also working hard to implement the recommendations of General Assembly Resolution 63/24, which you adopted by consensus exactly one year ago. I will refer to just a few of these.

Firstly, the General Assembly invited the UN Peacebuilding Commission to work with the IPU in engaging national parliaments in the countries under consideration by the Commission in efforts to promote democratic governance, national dialogue and reconciliation. To that end, we have expanded programs in Burundi and Sierra Leone in support of an inclusive political process. More recently, we have begun consultations with PBC on the type of capacity-building support that could be provided to the parliament in the Central African Republic.

Secondly, IPU has been working closely with the Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC to bring a robust parliamentary contribution to the Forum and the broader development cooperation agenda. We have begun a series of case studies in Africa on how parliaments relate to the aid effectiveness agenda, and are substantively involved in the preparations for the second DCF session next year.

Thirdly, your Resolution encouraged the IPU to strengthen its contribution to the Human Rights Council, particularly as it relates to the universal periodic review (UPR) of the fulfillment of human rights obligations and commitments by Member States. A recent IPU meeting on the UPR demonstrated enormous interest among parliaments in the process, in particular in terms of debating the draft national report in parliament before it becomes final, and receiving the outcome of the UPR review for further consideration. IPU will follow up on these recommendations.

Through these and other efforts to support UN activities and help bridge the divide between international commitment and national response, we trust that IPU and its member parliaments can make a meaningful contribution to the strengthening of the UN.

Mr. President,

Before I conclude, a brief word on the work ahead. Today – in this building - I chair a meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. We have a full agenda before us, and, as was the case during the previous parliamentary summits in 2000 and 2005, a significant part of the Speakers' reflection will focus on the parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations. We will be exploring options to further consolidate the institutional relationship between the UN system and the IPU.

We cannot do this alone. It will require substantive consultations at various levels: among the parliamentary leaders themselves, in capitals between the legislative and executive branches of Government, and here at UN Headquarters with Permanent Representatives and UN officials. We look forward to working closely with you all as we take this exciting journey. We should never lose sight of our common objective: to strengthen the United Nations as the cornerstone of multilateral cooperation, consolidate the rule of law in international relations, and deliver on the legitimate aspirations of our peoples for peace, freedom and prosperity.

I thank you for your attention.