



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Statement before the 66th General Assembly

Agenda item 32: Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Introduced by: Mr. Alessandro Motter, Senior Adviser

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

2011 has the potential to be the greatest leap forward for democracy in a generation. Across the Arab world, popular aspirations for freedom and democracy have brought changes that were unimaginable only a year ago. Revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have swept aside long-established rule and these countries have embarked on the difficult and uncertain path of democratization. These transitions are fragile. No one can say how much progress, and in what direction, will have been made one year from now. But the desire for freedom is a powerful one. Once unleashed, this is a force that cannot easily be stopped.

The IPU believes that the international fora that facilitate the sharing of good practices among new or restored democracies are very important. Each democracy is unique, but the lessons learned in one country in the process of democratization are likely to be of great interest to other countries that are travelling along a similar path. We will continue to provide a parliamentary dimension to the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies and will work towards its rapprochement with a similar mechanism in the Community of Democracies. We invite all countries to participate actively in these gatherings in order to help strengthen democracy worldwide.

Mr. President,

Elections alone do not lead to political stability, and nothing guarantees that new democracies will not revert back to authoritarian regimes. Most countries in the world have multiparty systems of government. Yet much remains to be done to consolidate open and effective democratic institutions. The consolidation of democracy takes time, as

well as long-term commitment from state authorities. Without that commitment, political leaders may fail to satisfy the expectations of the people.

Over the last year we were reminded many times that the removal of an authoritarian leader does not automatically ensure the birth of democracy. That will require strong representative institutions that will further support a culture of democracy. Consolidation of democracy therefore also requires active measures to ensure ongoing dialogue between political representatives and citizens. A functional democracy must allow all voices of society to be heard.

Mr. President,

Parliaments play a crucial role in building a relationship between political leaders and citizens, providing the basis for a viable democracy. As the most representative institution of government, parliaments need to ensure that the diverse interests of society are reflected, reconciled and articulated into sound policies for the benefit of all.

The IPU devotes much of its work to helping parliaments become ever more democratic; in other words, more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable, and effective. Over the course of the last year, IPU has engaged in capacity-building projects in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Maldives, Palestine, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Vietnam. These projects include, among many other aspects, the provision of advisory services on ethics and integrity, support to Women parliamentarians and caucuses, and parliamentary engagement with the MDGs.

The basis for a trusting relationship between political representatives and citizens is, of course, free and fair elections and transparency and accountability over funding of political life. To this end, the parliaments represented at the 124th IPU Assembly in April this year demonstrated political commitment by adopting a resolution on the prevention of electoral violence, and another on transparency and accountability in the funding of political parties and election campaigns. Our upcoming Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations will address the issue of political accountability from the perspective of political participation of the youth, effective cooperation with civil society, and budget transparency.

The IPU also works to equip parliaments with the necessary tools to educate their constituents about the tenets of democracy and the role of parliaments therein. People around the world expect a lot from their representatives, and especially in new and restored democracies; these expectations may often be unrealistic. Parliamentarians are asked to help provide access to health care, schools, and jobs, as well as, increasingly, to solve constituents' personal problems. Citizens' expectations can only be fulfilled if parliamentarians are given the opportunity to focus on their principal functions of making law and holding government to account. To address this issue, IPU's theme for the International Day of Democracy this year was, "What do citizens expect from their parliament?" In order to understand the relationship between parliaments and citizens

better, IPU and UNDP are cooperating to publish the first Global Parliamentary Report, which will be launched in early 2012. More than 1000 MPs from around the world were surveyed for the report, which explores how parliaments are adapting in order to effectively address the continuously changing needs of the people.

Mr. President,

Regardless of historical, cultural, and economic differences, the aspiration to live in societies based on the rule of law, justice, equality, human rights and democratic values, is universal. It is these values that will continue to guide the work of the IPU at this critical juncture in the development of democracy around the world. The future looks bright, as long as we are ready to seize the opportunity.

Thank you.