



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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## **STATEMENT BY THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION<sup>1</sup>** **Delivered by Mr. F. M. Vallersnes, President of its Committee on Middle East Questions**

United Nations General Assembly, 29 November 2004

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union during your debate on Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

The situation of the Palestinian people and the conflict that has ravaged the Middle East for so many years are issues that concern parliaments everywhere as well as their international organisation, the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Over the years, we have debated the conflict in the region and we have adopted resolutions on numerous occasions in which we condemn the violence and appeal for negotiations to achieve a lasting peace.

We abhor the violence and we call on all sides to take every necessary measure to put an end to the violent attacks that result in the deaths of large numbers of civilians. We condemn and strongly deplore targeted assassinations and suicide bombings, both of which perpetuate the cycle of violence and diminish the prospects for reconciliation. We call on the Israelis and the Palestinians to introduce a logic of peace to replace the logic of war, violence and terror by resuming political negotiations for a common future.

We also call for a halt to the building of settlements in the occupied territories which, along with the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, is in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Road Map. Equally, we call on Israel to abandon its policy of erecting barriers on Palestinian territory and to stop using its regular army to police the civilian population and conduct extrajudicial killings in the occupied territories. We also point out that the arrest and detention of two members of the Palestinian parliament – Mr. Bargouti and Mr. Khader, is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Oslo Accords.

We consistently call for the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State. In the same breath we affirm Israel's unequivocal right to live within secure borders. We are fully supportive of the implementation of the Road Map, and we would be prepared to assist in sending international observers to monitor the stage by stage implementation on the ground of the decisions that are contained in the Road Map.

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<sup>1</sup> Check against delivery

Mr. President,

Like people all over the world, the IPU deeply regrets the passing away of President Yasser Arafat. We believe we should all seek to turn this sad event into an opportunity to advance the cause of peace. The IPU stands ready to play its part in such an endeavour and the IPU Secretary General therefore visited both Israel and Palestine last week for talks with the parliamentary leadership in Ramallah and Jerusalem on this matter.

We warmly welcome the decision taken by the Palestinian Authority to hold presidential elections on 9 January 2005 and, at its request, we are encouraging parliaments everywhere to send observers for those elections. We also welcome the assurances provided by the Israeli authorities that they will make every effort to facilitate the holding of free and fair elections, including by making it possible for Palestinians in East Jerusalem to register and cast their vote in the elections and by withdrawing their military presence in towns and villages in the West Bank and the Ghaza strip so as to facilitate movement of people.

We are equally encouraged by the steps taken by the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah to finalise and adopt a new electoral law this year so that general and parliamentary elections can take place in the spring of next year. Here again we will wish to ensure a large parliamentary presence to observe the elections.

Mr. President,

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's attitude towards the situation in the Middle East is predicated on its conviction of and work to promote democracy. The fundamental notion underlying the exercise of democracy is the acceptance - or better still, the respect - of the other. Democratic life is both the right to differ as well as the acceptance of such differences by all. The point is to recognise difference and to allow it to exist rather than refuse it.

Political life is made up of confrontation. This is perfectly normal. The institutional mechanisms for managing public affairs are in fact partly designed to channel conflictive or simply different currents towards a single project: ensuring the common good.

It is thanks to the rules of democracy that political life is not just a shooting gallery but on the contrary aims to achieve positive results for the nation as a whole. It is for democratic institutions to mediate tensions and maintain equilibrium between the competing claims in society.

As part of that equation, parliament has an essential role to play in holding government to account. We are therefore responding positively to a request we have just received from the Palestinian Legislative Council to assist it in strengthening the institution of parliament with a special focus on its standing and select committees. Strong democratic institutions, including parliamentary control of the security sector, are essential elements in achieving peace in the region.

Mr. President,

In the early 1980s, the IPU set up a Committee on Middle East Questions and entrusted it with the task of promoting the holding of an International Conference on peace in the Middle East. Following the start of the peace process and the International Conference in 1991 as well as the agreements that were reached in Oslo, the Committee's mandate was broadened to include promoting a direct dialogue between Arab and Israeli parliamentary delegations at IPU meetings.

Recently, this Committee was asked to facilitate a direct political dialogue between members of the two concerned parliaments, the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Israeli Knesset. A first such meeting took place in Paris in January 2001.

Since then, this Committee, which I am honoured to chair, has organised some initial meetings of parliamentary delegations, both in the region and at IPU headquarters. Last year, the parties concerned decided to create a working group representing all political parties in each parliament that would address specific issues at each meeting.

During his recent trip to the region, the IPU Secretary General received clear indications that both the Legislative Council in Ramallah and the Knesset now stand ready to intensify this dialogue and we look forward to start organising a series of meetings in the early part of next year.

Let me end on a note of hope and with a plea. The IPU is convinced that no lasting solution can be found to conflict through the use of arms. Only political and direct dialogue can achieve that end and we believe that dialogue is possible if only given the slightest chance.

Let me also point out that the elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, for a long time now, are prevented from travelling to Ramallah with the result that Parliament cannot sit. This situation should not be allowed to prevail, it is in nobody's interest, not the Palestinians nor the Israelis.

We therefore appeal to those who have the means to intervene to ensure that parliament can meet so that political discussion can take place on the wide variety of urgent issues facing the Palestinian people in the legitimate and representative institution that they have established with the full support of the international community; the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Thank you Mr. President