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COMMUNICATION

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**Address of H. M. the King at the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly
Madrid, 26 November 2021**

Good afternoon.

May I, too, begin by offering you a very warm welcome to Spain and to our capital, Madrid. We are delighted to extend the city's characteristic hospitality to the more than 1000 participants joining the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly.

We feel a sense of pride – as well as responsibility – that you have chosen Spain as the place to resume the Assembly's in-person meetings. Thank you for the faith you have placed in the safeguarding and security requirements, in every respect.

Being able to meet, and share our daily lives and public activity in person, with safeguards in place and in compliance with health regulations, even before we can consider the fight against the virus over, is a very important step for our countries' social and economic recovery, and for institutional and cooperative relations between nations.

This is, of course, because it allows for deeper and more involved discussions and debates, but most of all because it allows us to establish and develop personal connections based on shared values; and that is the best starting point for agreement and closer cooperation between our societies and countries. That is what the Queen and I experienced over the last few days during our State Visit to the Kingdom of Sweden.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was born from the personal conviction and commitment of a few pioneers working for greater cooperation who, at the end of the 19th century, advocated pooling their opinions on the challenges facing parliaments, identifying those challenges to create a forum for cooperation and agreements. The vision of William Randal Cremer and Frédéric Passy became a reality with the 1st meeting in Paris, in 1889, which was attended by parliamentarians from France, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, the United States of America and Liberia.

Thus began a long history connecting the IPU with the main international cooperation institutions at the highest level, from the International Court of Arbitration in the Hague to the League of Nations and the UN.

And may I take this opportunity to remember briefly – and with great pride – the recognition given by UNESCO to the Spanish city of León as the birthplace of parliamentarianism. In fact, the corpus that came from the Courts of the former Kingdom of León, in Spain, dating back to 1188, is officially considered to be the “oldest documentary evidence of the European parliamentary system”.

Remembering the instigators of the IPU today is not only a way of paying tribute to those figures, but also a way of recognizing the capacity and strength of personal convictions and the action, including individual action, taken by every parliamentarian.

Parliaments are the central institutions of democracy. Each one, as a whole and through the sum of its individual parliamentarians, is a representation of its citizens and its nation. This representative nature and the essential requirement to reflect political pluralism are the foundation upon which the functions and characteristics of parliaments are built and their central position in democratic systems is based. Recognizing the diversity of legitimate options and the need to express and consider them is a fundamental and universal value of parliamentarianism.

However, representation is not the only purpose of parliaments; they are also there to make decisions and create political agreements and consensus. This purpose of parliamentary activity sometimes encounters difficult circumstances. That is why it seems to me particularly appropriate that the central topic of debate for your assembly is the threats to parliaments and democracy in the political and social circumstances of a given time.

This is an issue that corresponds perfectly to the desire of the founders of the IPU to create an instrument for reflection and cooperation in the face of challenges shared by different countries. And while I previously mentioned the necessary pluralism of parliamentary representation, it should also be noted that the function of political integration and establishing agreements is based on the action and commitment of every parliamentarian in the exercise of their individual powers and activities.

The days of work at the Assembly will provide an opportunity to discuss and incorporate the different viewpoints that will be contributed to the debates, which, I am sure, will form a common frame of reference for the task that every parliament and every State has to complete in this area.

This, then, is the fundamental purpose of parliamentary diplomacy: to create shared references and awareness to promote not only understanding and cooperation between our countries, but also individual action in each of them. And you will also all be able to use this time to tackle other issues of mutual concern, from the fight against and recovery from the pandemic, to the challenge posed by climate change.

But allow me to highlight in particular the debates of two institutions that are recent additions to the Inter-Parliamentary Union but are increasingly significant: the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Their recognition and development is testament to the openness of the IPU and its capacity for transformation and attention to the needs of today's parliaments.

The inclusion of women in the task of political representation is a requirement not only on the principle of equality or respect for women's rights. It is also a fundamental tool for safeguarding and developing those rights in all areas of our societies, and, undeniably, the talents and abilities of every female parliamentarian enrich public institutions.

I would therefore like to extend a special welcome to the members of the IPU Forum of Women Parliamentarians, which has already met today to continue its work.

The Forum of Young Parliamentarians, for its part, is key to strengthening the legitimacy of our parliaments and democracy, their capacity for integration and their vocation and responsibility for building the future.

And allow me to add to these special mentions a fraternal welcome to the Latin American parliaments, with whom Spain, its society and its institutions form a cultural and historical community of great political significance.

Likewise, I welcome our Mediterranean neighbours, who are part of a common space of shared interests and responsibilities that we strive to develop through cooperation between our States.

And I also believe that I may speak on behalf of the countries of the European Union, a true supranational community, when I confirm, here and now, our support for parliamentary cooperation, and say how pleased we are, after a long interval, to be holding an Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly on EU territory.

Once again, welcome to all parliamentarians honouring us with your presence today, from countries spanning the entire International Community. I am sure that the interest and diligence with which you will all work over the coming days will produce excellent results. And I also trust that you will have the opportunity to enjoy the city of Madrid and other parts of Spain during your visit. Thank you very much.