



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

**Resolution adopted unanimously by the 113th IPU Assembly
(Geneva, 19 October 2005)**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS INTERPLAY WITH
PARLIAMENTS AND OTHER DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED ASSEMBLIES
FOR THE MATURING AND DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY**

The 113th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Recognizing that a sincere and active commitment to interplay between civil society and parliaments and other democratically elected assemblies is a long-term political investment that, if properly managed, will contribute to ensuring peace, justice and prosperity, increase civic participation, and enhance the effectiveness of representative institutions and the legitimacy of governments,

Underscoring the close link between democracy and civil society, as well as the role of the latter in developing and strengthening democracy, and in introducing change required for development processes,

Aware that among democratic institutions parliament is a privileged forum for a transparent and free dialogue with the different forms of civil society,

Acknowledging that there will always be an essential difference between positive and constructive interplay, and relations that are or become confrontational, manipulative or inspired by hidden motives,

Noting that the articulation of this interplay must take into account both national and international dimensions, and with this the need for States to be committed not only to ensuring but also to promoting ongoing collaboration with civil society, with the aim of developing and consolidating democracy, and *recognizing* that the dynamic links between the maturing of democracy as a political process and its participatory nature can be strengthened by such interplay,

Recognizing the importance of building the capacity of citizens through education, as human and social capital are the driving forces and key elements in the democratization process, and are as important as financial and physical capital,

Acknowledging that parliaments around the world have a responsibility to provide a foundation for people-oriented social and economic policies which enhance bonds of trust, mutual confidence and reciprocity among citizens, and ensure appropriate, transparent and legally verifiable

funding, whose sole objective should be the promotion of democracy and not the subversion of legitimately constituted governments,

Reaffirming the IPU's Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted at the 161st Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Council (Cairo, September 1997) and the Resolution entitled Ensuring lasting democracy by forging close links between Parliament and people, adopted at the 98th Inter-Parliamentary Conference (Cairo, September 1997),

Recalling the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which encouraged governments to take measures to ensure women's full participation in power structures and decision-making and to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership, and in this connection *acknowledging* the important contribution to the development of participatory democracy that women's popular movements such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) make at the local and international levels,

Convinced that an enabling environment for civil society, ensured through legal provisions that guarantee the basic freedoms of assembly, association and expression in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional covenants and conventions, should be the cornerstone and basis of interplay between parliaments and civil society,

Stressing the need to establish a balanced partnership between the State and civil society that ensures transparency and accountability and the right of governments to enact laws governing the activities of civil society organizations,

Underlining the grass-roots-based and voluntary aspect of civil society, and *noting* the great differences in the structure of civil society in the various regions,

Stressing the fact that civil society is currently developing into a major global, social and economic force, and that its activities cover a very wide field, such as social services, education, health, human rights, communication and information,

Emphasizing the need to preserve the independence of civil society organizations and the importance of preventing them from being co-opted by foreign interests to advance illegal agendas,

Recognizing the importance of creative interplay between parliaments and civil society, especially in bridging gaps between various local groups and government bodies, public sector organizations, private business enterprises and the public,

Affirming that the financial relationships between civil society organizations and governments must be structured to provide needed support while avoiding co-optive pressures or the breakdown of ties between organizations and their constituencies that could compromise the independence and diversity of civil society organizations,

Conscious of forces that can undermine democracy by suppressing or manipulating civil society and that may emanate from intolerant governments or ideologies,

Conscious that poverty, unemployment, corruption and lack of opportunity limit the freedom of citizens, thus undermining the democratic system as a whole by inhibiting the integration of social organizations that foster democratic rights,

1. *Asserts* that the articulation of the interplay between civil society and parliaments and other democratically elected assemblies will not only contribute to the eradication of poverty, but also empower even the poorest of the poor to engage in general democratic life in their respective countries and, in so doing, will enhance the richness and credibility of political representation and strengthen the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes, and in this connection, *calls upon* parliaments to assist the efforts of NGOs to intensify the fight against poverty, so that all people have practical opportunities to participate in the development of civil society;
2. *Emphasizes* that only the full affirmation of political and social pluralism can ensure for all citizens the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms;
3. *Calls upon* all parliaments and governments to promote constructive interplay with their respective civil societies, with a view to optimizing the participatory character of their democracies, inter alia through the effective use of information technology and by bridging the digital divide between regions, and through the involvement of civil society organizations in gender-sensitive budgeting processes;
4. *Calls upon* the world's parliamentarians to initiate and implement projects to facilitate public participation and education for youth, women and men, thereby training civil society in the operations and functions of legislatures and in the importance of civic participation in sustaining democracies;
5. *Invites* parliaments and the IPU to set up mechanisms for the exchange of information, experience and best practices on the implementation and results of such projects;
6. *Further calls upon* parliaments to put forward flexible social policies pursuant to prevailing national laws, and to adopt legislation to promote civil society interactions and make it easier for voluntary organizations to register or to be incorporated, while at the same time guaranteeing the independence and diversity of NGOs, and ensuring that civil society organizations, whose support stems from ideologies based on fundamentalism and intolerance, are not encouraged;
7. *Also calls upon* parliaments to regularly review legislation relating to civil society organizations in order to guarantee their right to be registered and incorporated as legally independent entities;
8. *Emphasizes* that fair funding of civil society is necessary to consolidate democracies, and that this need gives both the public and private sectors a great opportunity to contribute by collaborating with civil society in ways that do not create co-optive pressures or erode the ties between such organizations and those they represent, and thus to sustain the independence and diversity of civil society organizations;
9. *Urges* all States to protect not only old, well-established organizations, but also new, democratic movements and associations in the most marginalized neighbourhoods and villages, and to support the struggle for tolerance and coexistence in those environments;
10. *Strongly urges* parliaments to support and where necessary enhance all constructive channels of political expression, the promotion of human rights and investment in human capital, through legislation, policies and regulations that promote civil society;

11. *Reiterates* that transparency and accountability are vital to civil society and that the establishment of mechanisms for control and self-discipline, and also of national and international codes of conduct, can bring about great improvements in this regard;
12. *Calls upon* parliaments to enact legislation and, in cooperation with civil society, to adopt all measures incumbent upon them in order to counter corruption, which poses an internal threat to democracy, and to promote discussions on anti-corruption measures, including through negotiations related to the United Nations Convention against Corruption;
13. *Urges* parliaments to promote conditions for the representatives of the corporate sector and NGOs to engage in a policy dialogue aimed at exploring avenues of increased collaboration, especially with regard to long-term commitments in areas such as the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, environmental protection and debt relief, and also aimed at identifying and removing impediments preventing NGOs from participating in and contributing to various fields of development;
14. *Invites* parliaments and governments to support, consistent with the national policies, the role played by civil society organizations in job creation and economic development, and to draw upon their expertise in this field;
15. *Urges* parliaments and governments to encourage the development and strengthening of civil society by providing the necessary support, training and technical assistance, and by organizing open hearings and other activities that promote a permanent dialogue with civil society;
16. *Invites* parliaments to create ongoing contacts with NGOs, including those that represent marginalized groups, with a view to encouraging a greater level of popular advocacy in political life, providing (and encouraging NGOs to seek from governments) systematic responses to advocacy, including both actions taken and clear explanations of inaction, so as to strengthen incentives for participation, and educating their constituents about the importance of civic participation at all levels;
17. *Calls upon* parliaments to adopt rules and procedures capable of ensuring an effective dialogue with civil society in the performance of parliamentary functions;
18. *Stresses* the importance of parliamentarians' developing direct contacts with civil society actors and citizens in general, both at the electoral district level, by establishing a parliamentary presence there where constituents can be received, and at the national or international level, by using information and communications technologies, for example;
19. *Recommends* that the IPU develop closer links with civil society and project itself as a global actor in the promotion of civil society by adopting a new comprehensive media strategy to make the Union better-known to the general public;
20. *Urges* parliaments to encourage active interaction among civil society groups through the sharing of experiences and exchange of views, to ensure best practices;
21. *Invites* parliaments to design, jointly with their governments, programmes that promote the teaching of democratic values such as freedom, equality before the law, and freedom of association, and *emphasizes* that these values are best defended and respected in an organized and well-informed society;

22. *Invites* parliaments and governments to ensure that legislation is worded in a manner that is clear and comprehensible for the citizen, and to ensure also that citizens and civil society actors are aware of their legal and constitutional rights and their responsibilities in the democratic process;
23. *Encourages* parliaments to ensure that their relations with the media and their information and communication policies for civil society and the public in general are development-focused, transparent and based on truth as well as mutual respect and the best interests of society.