



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHEMIN DU POMMIER 5
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GENEVA (SWITZERLAND)

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - FAX (41.22) 919 41 60 - E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org

**Statement by Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General,
at the annual session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva, 2 March 2011**

Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner
Members of the Council
Distinguished Delegates,

We live in historic times. The massive popular movements that we are witnessing these days clearly demonstrate that people everywhere aspire to democracy and respect for human rights.

Democracy is a universally recognized ideal that is based on values that are common to people everywhere. Democracy is about ensuring respect for human rights and social justice. It is about public participation and accountability.

Those who are taking to the streets these days remind us that the essential role of government is to serve the people. Governments - and parliaments – that ignore such demands for change do so at their peril.

Parliaments everywhere have the responsibility to represent the people, adopt legislation and hold government to account on behalf of the people. They must be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people and must help ensure respect for the States human rights obligations.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union takes this to heart. We see this as our core mission: helping parliaments become truly effective in their representative, legislative and oversight roles. We fundamentally believe that better parliaments lead to stronger democracies. We provide direct and tailored assistance to our Member Parliaments for this purpose.

We promote standards for democratic parliaments and offer a platform for parliaments to examine how they can better live up to people's expectations. In fact, that is the main theme for our next assembly.

Mr. President,

Clearly, only parliaments that fulfil certain criteria are able to live up to people's expectations. They must be representative of the people. How well a parliament represents the people depends on many factors. One of them has to do with the electoral process, how elections are financed, what mechanisms are in place to ensure respect for the outcome of the elections. These issues are on IPU's current agenda and we are in the process of drawing some initial conclusions.

Political parties play a crucial role too. Most members of parliament in the world enter parliament through a political party. How that party acts, how democratic it is, how transparent, how accountable and how tolerant it is of divergent views and, ultimately, how respectful it is of freedom of speech and opinion, will

greatly influence how representative parliament is or can be. The IPU is finalizing a study on this matter which we will be tabling before our members in the coming months.

A third aspect of representation has to do with how well minorities and indigenous peoples are represented in parliaments. For the last eighteen months, the IPU has been devoting special attention to this particular aspect. We are doing so in close cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, some of your special representatives and the UNDP.

We have gathered and analysed data, undertaken case studies and held a global parliamentary conference focussing on what we can do together to ensure more effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in politics. The "Chiapas Declaration" adopted by that Conference calls for genuine change so that minorities and indigenous peoples no longer remain excluded from the decision-making that affects their lives and the future of their countries. The Declaration contains recommendations for action which we are presenting to your Council and on which we are now following up.

Mr. President,

Parliament's mandate of legislating and ensuring government's accountability is of the utmost importance when it comes to your work in this Council. In my last two interventions, I raised the question of conceiving a parliamentary dimension to what you do and made several proposals to this end. Now that you are reviewing your functioning and procedure, let me insist on one issue, the Universal Periodic Review.

It should be clear to all of us that without parliamentary action, be it at the legislative or oversight levels, few of the recommendations that come out of the UPR process will be implemented. A survey that we have undertaken of parliamentary awareness of the UPR has shown that the huge majority of parliaments are not even aware of the UPR's existence.

How can they possibly then provide input into national reports, attend the discussion in the Council on their country reports and most importantly ensure implementation of your recommendations? The UPR should not be reserved purely for governments, National Human Rights Institutions and NGOs. It should be open to the participation of parliaments.

In the IPU we do our best to familiarise parliaments with the UPR and we have seen that once they know about it, they are keen to contribute. But you too have the means to involve parliaments, although they are unfortunately not among the stakeholders mentioned in General Assembly Resolution 60/251.

We have circulated a proposal as to how parliaments can and should be involved in the UPR process. I believe you have a clear mandate from the General Assembly to take this into account. In its most recent Resolution on cooperation between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU, the General Assembly encouraged the IPU - and I quote to strengthen its contribution to the UN human rights treaty bodies, and to the Human Rights Council, particularly as it relates to the universal periodic review of the fulfilment of human rights obligations and commitments by Member States.

Mr. President,

Like in other endeavours in life, success will require a partnership; in this instance between this Council and the IPU. Let me end by reiterating to this Council that the IPU remains committed to playing its part to ensure greater parliamentary involvement in your work, and more particularly to the UPR. We are convinced that this can only enhance your effectiveness. I invite you to join us in this crucial exercise.

Thank you