



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

5, CHEMIN DU POMMIER
CASE POSTALE 330
1218 LE GRAND SACONNEX / GENÈVE (SUISSE)

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - FAX (41.22) 919 41 60 - E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS : INTERPARLEMENT GENEVE

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**Statement by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson
IPU Secretary General**

On Behalf of the Parliamentary Track

***Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries
Monday, 9 May 2011
Istanbul***

Mr. Secretary General of the Conference
Distinguished Delegates

The parliamentary track that I represent today started two years ago. Its purpose was simple: to make sure that, as the international community geared up for yet another major conference on the Least Developed Countries, the views of parliamentarians would be heard. Ten years ago, in the outcome of the Brussels conference, there was not a word on parliaments. For most of the last decade parliaments have been seen as marginal to the implementation of the Brussels commitments.

I am glad to see that our purpose has been accomplished. The latest draft of the Programme of Action refers to the role of parliaments in debating and monitoring development plans and policies, and in supporting participation, transparency and accountability. My thanks are due to the parliamentarians who worked hard in their parliaments at home to make this happen and to the many who answered the call to attend this conference.

If we put our heart in it, there is no reason why we cannot chart a new development trajectory for the LDCs. If governments and parliaments listen attentively to the people, treating all as equals under the law, regardless of wealth, social status or gender, with the same rights to participate and be represented in decision-making, then we have a chance.

The underlying problem of development is political. It is not economic.

The LDCs are 880 million people who are tremendously rich in culture, skills, and natural wealth. The problem has to do with who decides *what, how* and for *whom*. It is about who gets a place at the table where the decision are made. This means decision-making at home, in parliaments and cabinet rooms, and abroad, in the international financial institutions or the G20.

There are countless examples of this reality, and of possible remedies. Let me give you a few possibilities:

Do we want to jump-start rural economies in the LDCs? Let's give women the same rights that men have to buy land or take out loans. And let's make sure that women participate equally in politics; All politics, from national to local.

Do we want to get the poor out of the informal sector and into small enterprises, into jobs that pay decent wages and benefits? Let's make it easy for them to do things like getting a business license or forming a labour union.

Do we want people to benefit from their countries' natural resources? Let's make sure that exploitation rights are not undersold to foreign concerns in corrupt deals, and that taxes are collected to support social programmes.

Do we want people to invest in their small business or in their children's education without fearing that it may all come to naught because of yet another conflict? Let's strengthen our political institutions. This means political parties and electoral systems. And it means the parliaments, the place where opposing interests can be reconciled without taking up weapons.

Do we want foreign aid to be put to its best possible use, in line with the people's priorities, with no waste and minimal overheads? Let's make sure all aid is subject to parliamentary scrutiny in both donor and recipient countries and that aid information is publicly available.

Do we want the LDCs to develop their productive capacities so that their economies can stand on their own? Let's have an international investment regime that protects their small industries, or a trade regime that is not unfairly tilted toward the wealthier countries!

Again, this is not to deny the economic challenges. But economic problems are locked into larger questions of representation, inclusion and accountability. However you look at it, the issues always come down to the role of parliaments in holding the government accountable, adopting laws and budgets, and representing the people as a whole.

Further complicating the picture, especially in the LDCs, there is a huge capacity gap that often makes it difficult for parliaments to function effectively. Demanding progress reports on national development strategies, holding public hearings to debate the government's budget package, scrutinizing public spending with the support of a non-partisan auditor's report, or participating in policy dialogues between governments and donors where decisions about aid are made: all LDC parliaments should know how to do these things, but not many do so effectively.

This question of governance comes up in virtually all meetings of the IPU, including the Forum that we held yesterday to mark the conclusion of the parliamentary track.

Governance is also at the heart of the Parliamentary Message that you will have found in the conference document kit. The message is meant for you, but also for the parliaments of the IPU that subscribed to it as their own commitment. Among other things, it calls on all parliaments in both LDCs and non-LDCs to review their own institutional processes to help mainstream the commitments of this conference at all levels of policy-making.

The message makes it clear that the resolution of issues affecting the LDCs will depend on stronger partnerships between all stakeholders. It will depend on the willingness of LDCs themselves to mobilize their own resources while the international community does its part to provide aid, debt relief and foreign investment.

As we turn a new page here in Istanbul, and look toward the decade before us, we are all too aware of the desperate need to put words into action. At yesterday's Parliamentary Forum we finalized an

implementation plan for the IPOA exclusively focused on parliaments. The plan builds on our close cooperation with the Office of the High Representative and from inputs from our generous partner here in Istanbul, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. It will help support parliaments by making them aware of the commitments of the new Programme of Action and, more importantly, empowering them to bring those commitments to fruition.

The Plan focuses exclusively on building capacity in LDC parliaments. It is results oriented, eminently practical and down to earth. It represents an investment in parliaments to help them achieve results for the benefit of the people they have been elected to represent. I call on you all to provide the modest resources that are required for this plan so that parliaments can fulfil the role and responsibilities you have identified for them in the Istanbul Plan of Action.

Thank you.