



# 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](mailto:postbox@mail.ipu.org)  
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS : INTERPARLEMENT GENEVE

## IPU STATEMENT

**Agenda item 20 of the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly:**

***Support by the UN system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.***

**Presented by Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary General**

**5 November 2003 United Nations, New York**

Mr. President,  
Honourable delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this Assembly on matters relating to democracy, a subject that lies at the very heart of the IPU and of which our members - the Parliaments - are the very embodiment.

The IPU devotes considerable time and resources to improving knowledge and understanding of the meaning of democracy. In 1997, our members developed and adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy, which has since guided much of our action.

For the IPU, democracy is a universally recognised ideal based on values shared by people throughout the world irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is also a system of government that is applied in differing ways, reflecting the diversity of experiences.

According to the IPU, democracies aim to protect the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual. They seek to bring about social justice, nurture the economic and social welfare of the community and invigorate the fabric of society.

For the IPU, the legislative branch of government holds the key to democracy. Parliament has crucial functions in law-making and overseeing government. It is the sovereign institution by which a country can ensure government by the people and for the people. By playing its representational role efficiently, parliaments make sure that the voices of all, majority and minorities, are heard and their interests adequately articulated.

It is in parliaments that the diverging interests of a nation compete and are, or should be, channelled towards the single objective of ensuring the common good. As activities of

parliaments cover the entire spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, their decisions inevitably affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thus, democracy and human rights are intrinsically linked, mutually reinforcing and, indeed, indispensable to each other. Parliament is the State institution that lies at the very heart of human rights. It embodies the fundamental human right of every people to determine its fate and to take part in the conduct of public affairs.

Equally essential is the relationship between gender equality and democracy. Although democracies guarantee the right to equality and the principle of non-discrimination, women's participation on an equal footing with men in politics is still far from being a reality. There is a real and urgent need to ensure women's access to, and participation in, political and public life.

On this basis, the IPU helps foster democracy through a variety of very practical programmes and activities. We provide assistance to parliaments. With the support of seasoned parliamentarians and expert staff seconded to the IPU from our member parliaments, the Union undertakes needs assessments and develops and implements projects that aim at modernising and strengthening the parliamentary institution.

These activities are not merely technical; they address the whole gamut of parliamentary work. While they include induction seminars for newly elected MPs, staff training and parliamentary services development, many activities focus on substantive issues such as human rights promotion and protection, gender issues, the budget process, parliamentary oversight of the security sector and the fight against terrorism, to mention but a few. Emphasis is also placed on promoting openness, accountability and standards in public life and ensuring sustainable political processes that must include a meaningful role for the opposition in parliament.

Several of these projects are carried out by the IPU in close cooperation with the United Nations and often with the support of UNDP. Many of them assist parliaments and political processes in countries that have gone through civil strife and armed conflict and are part of a larger and more comprehensive peace-building effort by the international community.

I have underscored this aspect of our work, Mr. President, because the IPU believes it can make a particular, even crucial, contribution to the United Nations in promoting democracy. This conviction is, I believe, fully shared by the United Nations. Indeed, the Millennium Declaration calls for strengthened cooperation between the UN and national parliaments through their world organisation - the Inter-Parliamentary Union, specifically in relation to issues of human rights and democracy.

For that very reason, the IPU provided support to the fifth International Conference on New or Restored Democracies in Ulaan Baator, Mongolia. Working together with the State Great Hural or Parliament of Mongolia, the IPU organised a meeting of members of parliament in parallel to the conference. Some fifty parliaments were represented at this meeting that debated parliaments' role in promoting democracy.

At the end of their deliberations, members of parliament who attended the event, numbering some 120, adopted a declaration that was subsequently endorsed by the IPU's governing bodies meeting last month in Geneva.

The declaration, which has been circulated to all Member States and which I commend for your attention, reiterates the core principles and values of participation, transparency and accountability in democracies and outlines their key ingredients of respect for human rights, including freedom of expression and association, the rule of law, partnership between men and women in political life and the existence of a vibrant civil society

The Declaration also contains a menu of proposed parliamentary action in support of democracy. It includes, but is not limited to, undertaking structural and legislative reforms to facilitate greater participation of women in decision-making, fostering integrity and public trust and confidence in public institutions through more rigorous application of codes of conduct, and generally seeking more effective parliamentary oversight processes and structures.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is committed to following up on this Declaration. We have brought it to the attention of all Parliaments, we are encouraging them to examine its recommendations, and we look forward to working with them in ensuring its implementation.

As you can see from the Declaration, the IPU also proposes to participate in the identification and formulation of indicators of democracy. We believe that the extensive experience the Organisation has gained over the years and the particular role parliaments assume in democracies makes them and us ideal partners for this exercise.

Finally, Mr. President, the IPU also wishes to take an active part in the mechanisms that will be established to follow-up on the work of the Fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies. We consider this participation necessary to ensure that parliaments work in consort with United Nations action to defend and promote democracy.

Speaking on behalf of the President of the IPU, Senator Páez Verdugo of Chile, who regrets not being able to be with you here today, I would therefore like to conclude by seeking the support of this General Assembly for including a strong contribution from parliaments, working through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the follow-up programme that you will establish at the end of your deliberations. We hope the suggestions I have made can be taken into account when developing such a programme.

Thank you.