



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by Ambassador Anda Filip Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations

United Nations General Assembly joint debate:

The situation in Afghanistan: its implication of international peace and security (agenda item 27);
Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan (agenda item 39d)

8 December 2004

Mr. President,

It gives me pleasure to address the General Assembly today during this debate on a matter which is very close to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's mandate. I will want to focus my remarks on the need for urgent international assistance in building representative institutions in Afghanistan.

We believe that strong representative institutions, especially parliaments, functioning in an accountable and transparent manner are the cornerstone to democracy and good governance. Afghanistan, which is the focus of our discussion today, is one of the countries where the IPU pursues this vision.

After 25 years of war and political instability, Afghanistan has just chosen a President, following a hotly contested and largely democratic presidential election. The next step in setting up democratic institutions will be the establishment, by the autumn of 2005, of a modern parliament. Under the new Constitution adopted in January 2004, a bicameral National Assembly will be created, with an upper house, the Meshrano Jirga, and a lower house, the Wolesi Jirga. Because of the country's lack of recent parliamentary experience, the Afghan authorities face a daunting challenge in establishing and sustaining a viable legislature. The IPU is committed to making every effort to support them in achieving this objective.

In cooperation with the UNDP country office in Afghanistan, the Inter-Parliamentary Union carried out a month-long needs assessment mission to Kabul last October-November. The mission assisted the Afghan authorities in identifying the needs of the future National Assembly. It identified major areas where action needs to be taken as a matter of urgency if the future parliament is to convene on the appointed date and if it is to be an effective legislature that is representative and which meets the expectations of the people of Afghanistan.

- First of all, it is important that an institutional legal framework be in place. In other words, legislative texts, including the provisional rules of procedure of both Houses have to be prepared.
- Secondly, if the new parliament is to be able to carry out the tasks assigned to it by the Constitution, action should be taken as soon as possible to train the future parliamentary staff so that they have at least a basic knowledge of their work. Such professional development must also be extended to the members of the Assembly once they are elected.

- Thirdly, there is obviously the need to direct efforts at improving the infrastructure earmarked for the National Assembly, so that it be adapted to the cultural and religious specificities of the country, as well as to the special needs of people with disabilities, as enshrined in the Constitution itself. There is no gainsaying that information and communication technologies in the newly established institution will be crucial for this nascent institution to function well and coherently, both internally and in terms of its relations and interaction with the broader Afghan society.

In addition to these areas of focus, the IPU stresses that special efforts must be made to address such fundamental issues as the institution's bilingualism (it will operate in Dari and Pashto), the full participation of women in parliament after nearly 10 years of Taliban rule (the IPU has welcomed the fact that the Constitution provides equal rights to men and women and guarantees that women will make up at least 25 per cent of the representatives in the lower house of parliament), and the relations between the Assembly and the public, including the most vulnerable groups. Once again, the new National Assembly must be accessible, transparent and representative of all Afghan citizens, whatever their ethnic origin and gender. It must act as the interface between the State and the people by pursuing an agenda that promotes public outreach.

The new parliament will be inaugurated at a time when Afghanistan is in need of a strong legislative body. That institution should have the capacity to devise and adopt in a speedy fashion a whole range of legislation that will govern a new Afghanistan after so many years of conflict and instability. As a forum for the confrontation of ideas and for the forging of consensus around key national issues and policies, it will have a major role to play to ensure that past tensions do not come to the fore again giving rise to unnecessary strife and suffering for the people of Afghanistan. It is in this way that it can contribute to the establishment of conditions conducive to lasting development and peace.

The IPU stands committed to working with its Afghan and international partners, in furthering these objectives. The programme of action proposed by the IPU/UNDP mission provides a framework for such co-operation, thereby ensuring greater coherence in the actions undertaken by the international community to foster democratic institutions in Afghanistan in the coming months.

I thank you for your attention.