



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Permanent Observer**

General Assembly

Item 10: Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to
promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

United Nations
New York, 15 December 2005

Mr. President,

I am pleased to take the floor and refer to the Report of the Secretary General under consideration today on the efforts under way to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, and to expand a bit on the contribution the Inter-Parliamentary Union is bringing to this process.

Back in 1997, the member parliaments of the IPU developed and adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy, which has since guided much of our action, particularly as it relates to providing relevant assistance to young parliamentary institutions and building capacities therein. Parliament is, after all, the main institution of the state where the voices of all, majority and minorities, should be heard and their interests adequately articulated. It is in parliaments that the diverging interests of a nation compete and are, or should be, channeled towards the single objective of ensuring the common good, which inevitably includes the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On the occasion of the fifth International Conference on New or Restored Democracies in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, a little over two years ago, the IPU worked together with the Parliament of Mongolia in organizing a parliamentary forum aimed at looking at the role of parliaments in promoting democracy. Indeed, as the overall theme of the Fifth Conference was democracy, good governance and civil society, this theme was reflected in the parliamentary forum, and participants focused on how parliaments could strengthen democracy in partnership with civil society and how that role could be fulfilled in a coherent and coordinated manner at the international level. The overarching focus of the debates was participation as a cornerstone of democracy.

At the end of their deliberations, members of parliament who attended the event, numbering some 120 from over 50 countries, adopted a declaration that was subsequently endorsed by the IPU's full membership. That declaration, in sum, reiterates the core principles and values of participation, transparency and accountability and outlines the key ingredients for any democracy - 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 at the national level 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. Also, there was a strong sense that democracy should not remain a theoretical concept. The Forum spent a great deal of time debating ways in which democracy could be translated into concrete and practical reality. For instance, democracy should help to combat corruption through more transparency in the management of public affairs as a means of ensuring accountable, honest and effective government.

The Ulan Bator Parliamentarians' Forum was the first such event at the ICRND. It was thus an innovative and successful experience as evidenced by the agreement by the main Conference for it to be a permanent feature of the ICNRD. On the occasion of the Sixth International Conference next year in Doha therefore, parliamentarians will provide an important opportunity to take stock of progress achieved in the restoration, establishment and/or consolidation of democratic processes at the national level – more countries for example holding free elections, establishing representative institutions (including parliaments) and allowing for the plurality of expression. It will also allow for a review of the areas where more efforts will need to be deployed, including through more balanced representation of men and women in political processes.

Mr. President,

For its part, the IPU has been following up on a number of the recommendations of the Forum. It is currently in the process of updating its standards in the area of elections. It has recently published a compendium of expert papers on developments in the electoral field, including innovative mechanisms by which to judge elections. Early next year, it expects to publish an updated version of its publication *Free and fair elections: international law and practice*. This publication was first issued 10 years ago, and contains the 'Declaration of Criteria for Free and Fair Elections', which has been used worldwide as a guide for those involved in organizing and monitoring elections.

Another exercise the IPU has embarked upon as a direct follow-up to the Parliamentarians' Forum in Ulan Bator is a project to establish a framework for democracy from the parliamentary perspective. This project is identifying good practices by parliaments in promoting democracy, with a specific focus on representation both at the national and international levels. The resulting framework should serve as a guide for encouraging the promotion by parliaments of processes and mechanisms that enhance democracy. This project is expected to be concluded by the middle of 2006 and will serve as an important contribution to the sixth International Conference on New or Restored Democracies and the related Parliamentarians' Forum, to be held in Doha- Qatar in November 2006.

Last, but not least, and in addition to the above efforts, the IPU has continued its work to assist in strengthening capacities in parliaments in emerging democracies such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, East Timor, Albania, and hopefully very soon, Iraq.

In conclusion, I would mention that the IPU welcomes the initiative of the Secretary General to call for a study on the comparative advantages, complementarity and desirable distribution of labour of various intergovernmental (and inter-state) democracy movements, organizations and institutes, whether global and regional, and on how the United Nations system has worked and could further work with them in a mutually supportive way. The IPU stand ready to be part of this process and looks forward to a more in-depth discussion on this issue next year in Doha.

I thank you for your attention.