



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

High-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals

STATEMENT by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU
United Nations, New York, 20 September 2010

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring to this meeting the greetings of the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who - as the President of the General Assembly that presided over the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 - much regrets that urgent business prevents him from being with us here today.

Mr. President,

A few weeks back, Speakers of Parliaments from most countries in the world convened in Geneva to attend the 3rd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. Their parliamentary summit issued a call for securing global democratic accountability for the common good.

We have circulated the outcome document and I commend it to your attention. It contains several commitments to strengthen democracy through parliaments, including here at the United Nations. The Speakers of Parliament call for an imaginative leap of faith. They emphatically state that today's multilateral systems should allow for much greater consideration for the feelings and aspirations of people everywhere.

The Speakers call for greater parliamentary involvement in international cooperation to help remedy this deficiency and propose actions to be taken by parliaments and by the IPU in pursuit of this objective.

Mr. President,

The Speakers' Summit had a dual objective: to take stock of progress in developing a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation and to assess parliamentary involvement in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

The MDGs, the Speakers declared, will not be met without an accompanying sense of accountability. Democracy, security, development, human rights and gender equality are inextricably linked. The Speakers pledged to support efforts in parliament to ensure that the development goals are taken into account in their daily work and translated into national programs and laws. They encouraged all parliaments, when examining draft budgets and bills, to assess their impact on the fulfillment of the MDGs.

The women Speakers of Parliament who met in Bern on the eve of the parliamentary summit called for stronger efforts at meeting MDGs 4 and 5 and invited all parliaments to join them in implementing the Bern initiative for global parliamentary action on maternal and child health.

Mr. President,

Taking stock of progress, the Speakers noted that much work has been done in parliaments to legislate to make the goals achievable. Where there has been less progress is in the area of parliamentary oversight and review of progress. Here, there is still scope for improvement. It is understandable that officials, already burdened by elaborate and time-consuming MDG reporting requirements, might be disinclined to extend the process further by tabling the reports in parliament. However, the investment is worth it.

At the end of the day, none of the goals will succeed unless there is broad political support and national ownership. In fact, the only way to forge a truly national agenda is by bringing all parties on board and the only place where that can be done is parliament.

In other words, the fulfillment of the MDGs is also an exercise in democracy.

The work that the IPU and member parliaments have carried out in support of the MDGs over several years, as well as the recent debate among the Speakers, demonstrate palpable progress on the MDGs - enough to justify a more upbeat mood than in the past. The solutions have been identified and the MDGs are within reach if there is enough political will and true leadership.

Many Speakers made the point that in helping define and in overseeing MDG-related policies, it is important to remember that there is no one-size-fits all: the MDGs must be localized to the development realities of each country. In some cases it is more important to focus on making progress than on achieving absolute results.

There is universal support for the claim that better oversight of development aid is essential. Additionally, the trade regime must change: there is no hope for balanced trading conditions when domestic production is still so heavily subsidized in some parts of the world. Excessive policy conditionality also remains an issue in many countries. Good governance remains key to the success of the MDGs, and good governance correlates positively with development results.

Mr. President,

Several delegations present in New York these days include members of parliament. The IPU welcomes this growing practice and encourages other governments to follow suit. We are meeting with them tomorrow to develop a strategy for ensuring greater parliamentary involvement and active support for attaining the MDGs by 2015. As we do so, we will of course look to your outcome document and also to the many reports and comparative studies which the IPU has prepared and circulated in advance of today's summit.

But more than anything, Mr. President, we will want to regenerate that very special moment which existed at the turn of the Millennium; an extraordinary moment when all the world's leaders congregated in New York to make a commitment to improve the lives of people everywhere, the very people we as members of parliament, represent. The IPU has a special place in the declaration they adopted on that occasion and we are happy to shoulder the responsibility they have placed on us.

Let me therefore end by making a commitment on behalf of the IPU. We will redouble our efforts to mobilize and assist parliaments in doing their part in attaining the MDGs by 2015. We also propose to start working with them here and now so that by the time you meet five years from now, parliaments will be part of the process that will set future development goals. That will be both a political and a practical way to strengthen the role of the United Nations in global governance.

Thank you.