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REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE IPU ON HIS ACTIVITIES SINCE THE 192nd SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

The past six months have been eventful to say the least. I was invited to represent the IPU at several major events and was compelled to decline more than one invitation. Nevertheless, I have endeavoured to discharge my duties as President of the IPU, representing the Organization at a number of international and regional events to give it greater visibility and promote its ideals. I have been in close and constant contact with the Secretary General, discussing various issues affecting the IPU and matters of global importance.

On the heels of the Quito Assembly, I attended with the Secretary General the Fourth G-20 Speakers' Consultation Forum in Mexico City from 3 to 5 April. I delivered an opening address, focusing first and foremost on the post-2015 development agenda and the future Sustainable Development Goals.

Stressing that growth alone was not the answer to the social, economic and environmental challenges of our time, I appealed for a different approach based on well-being in all its dimensions – the famous "buen vivir" we debated so extensively in Quito.

I pointed to the democracy deficit and the need for greater transparency, accountability and participation, particularly regarding the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Tighter controls and regulations, I advised, should be introduced and serve as a counterweight to the influential lobbying of the financial sector.

I welcomed the decision taken by the G-20 countries to work together to end sexual violence in conflict, which echoed to a large extent the Presidential Statement on Sexual Violence issued at the Quito Assembly a few days earlier.

At the invitation of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU), I attended the 19th AIPU Conference in Kuwait City on 9 and 10 April. Among other issues, the Conference discussed the state of affairs in Arab States, the need for greater solidarity and cooperation, and reform undertaken in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The meeting welcomed the good relations it enjoyed with the IPU and highlighted the assistance provided by the Organization to several Arab parliaments, notably in Egypt, Libya and Syria, following the Arab Spring.

As I mentioned earlier, regrettably, I had to decline a few invitations. I did, however, address a short message to the meetings I could not attend, extending my best wishes for fruitful deliberations.

I travelled to IPU Headquarters for talks with the Secretary General and senior staff on two occasions over the past six months. During my first visit, on 15 and 16 May, we discussed inter alia developments with regard to implementation of the IPU Strategy for 2012-2017, the logo and the procedure for selecting the next Secretary General. While there, I attended a virtual meeting of the Sub-Committee on Finance and was briefed on the main orientations of the 2014 budget.

During my second trip, from 21 to 23 July, the Secretary General and his management team consulted me on a wide range of issues, first and foremost the matter of visa assurances for the 130th IPU Assembly, scheduled to be held in Baku in April 2014. I was informed about a number of membership issues, received an update on the procedure for the selection of the new Secretary General, the 2014 budget and the IPU's visual identity, specifically the logo. We discussed the possibility of organizing a mission to Syria, preparations for the next Speakers' Conference in 2015 and other future meetings. I also attended another teleconference of the Sub-Committee on Finance on 23 July.

On 5 and 6 June I hosted with the Moroccan Parliament a Regional IPU-UNDP Seminar on "The evolving relationship between citizens and parliaments in the Arab world" in my stumping ground of Rabat, Morocco. The purpose of the Seminar was inter alia to launch the ground-breaking Global Parliamentary Report, a joint IPU-UNDP publication, for Arab countries, as well as the AGORA Portal for Parliamentary Development in Arabic. Focusing on parliamentary representation in the Arab world, participants examined how to manage citizens' expectations, the usefulness of codes of conduct and the effective use of social media by MPs.

I issued a statement to the Bangladesh Parliament at its special session on 8 June dedicated to the launch of a policy brief based on a study on gender mainstreaming conducted at the parliament. In it I congratulated the newly elected Speaker, the first woman to hold that prestigious post in the country's history, and applauded the Parliament for its pioneering efforts to achieve gender equality. Underscoring the IPU's support for the initiatives taken by the Bangladesh Parliament, I expressed the hope that other parliaments around the world would follow suit in a bid to become gender-sensitive institutions.

I delivered an opening address to the 13th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference held in Rabat on 26 and 27 June. With a view to promoting Afro-Arab cooperation, I underscored the need to support the economies of those countries, particularly through joint economic projects. I also highlighted the need to ensure respect for religion and holy places in both regions, as well as the role of African and Arab parliaments in protecting national cultures in the face of globalization.

I was invited to serve as a panellist at a thematic debate on "The contribution of the Economic and Social Council to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda" on 4 July in Geneva as part of ECOSOC's 2013 substantive session. Although I was prevented from attending myself, the IPU was represented at that meeting by Belgian MP Francois-Xavier De Donnea. On my behalf, he made a strong case for parliamentary involvement in shaping the successors of the current Millennium Development Goals.

On learning that President Mohammed Morsi had been ousted by the army in Egypt, on 4 July I issued a strong statement calling for an immediate return to democracy in the country. "Time and again over the last two years the Egyptian people have demonstrated their desire to live in a democratic society, able to enjoy individual and collective freedoms and to take part in all aspects of public life. Their aspirations must be respected at all costs", I stated.

I called on the interim authorities to organize free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections while upholding the rule of law and defending an impartial judiciary. I reiterated that the IPU "remains committed to providing assistance and support to the Egyptian Parliament. We urge Egypt not to stray from the path of establishing a genuine democracy in the country as soon as possible."

Based on the preliminary findings of the mission to Jordan conducted by the IPU Committee to Promote International Humanitarian Law with UNHCR support, I made an appeal to the parliamentary community as a whole to support the UN Regional Response Plan 5 in support of Syrian refugees and host communities. I also appealed to individual parliaments to urge their governments to make a financial contribution, however modest, to alleviate the plight of Syrian refugees and ease the burden on host countries.

During this period I held several consultations with the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) on a number of issues, in particular the situation in Syria.

At the invitation of the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Mr. Zhang Dejiang, I travelled to China on a bilateral visit in early September aimed at strengthening the cooperation ties between this great nation and the IPU. In Beijing, I met with senior parliamentary officials, who expressed their great deference to the IPU. They described the Organization as the oldest and most important international organization of which China is a member. China joined the IPU in 1984 and a Chinese parliamentary delegation has attended every IPU Assembly ever since. In 1996, China hosted the 96th IPU Conference in Beijing and in 2005, the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Hong Kong, organized on the occasion of the WTO Ministerial Conference.

The IPU had made great strides recently, especially in terms of its role vis-à-vis the United Nations, and China wished to strengthen its participation in IPU activities. Senior parliamentary officials stood ready to assist the Organization in implementing its Strategy for 2012-2017. Like the IPU, China's position on conflicts, particularly the one in Syria, was unequivocal: a political solution must be sought through dialogue and negotiation.

I issued a statement to mark International Day of Democracy, 15 September, underscoring that there could be no real democracy without a strong political opposition. I added that "the horrific violence and breakdown in Egypt and Syria ... are witness to what happens when people are denied a political voice and are shut out from political decision-making". Stressing the need to encourage political engagement from all sectors of society, I noted that "inclusive politics based on a healthy respect for differences is the solution to the many conflicts and crises the world is facing today".

Building on this year's theme, "Strengthening voices for democracy", I underscored the importance of respecting the right to peaceful assembly for all. Public protest was "a legitimate expression of public feeling on any question. Outside of the ballot box, it is often the only way for an electorate to be heard and hopefully, listened to".

I also participated in activities organized by the Moroccan Parliament to commemorate International Day of Democracy this year, where I delivered an opening address. Both the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Speaker of the House of Councillors took part in the events, as well as members of the Bureau, representatives of the various parliamentary groups and civil society, especially women's and youth organizations.

In September I wrote to the Prime Minister of Egypt, asking him to update me on the situation in his country. I expressed the IPU's concern at the latest developments there and lack of tangible progress in restoring democracy and an elected parliament.

Lastly, I issued a statement calling for democratic processes and the rule of law to be respected in the Maldives ahead of the second round of presidential elections in the tiny island-nation. I deplored the violence and intimidation suffered by parliamentarians and urged the country to renew its commitment to democracy. "All nations have their share of political conflict. What separates the successful democracies from the less successful ones is their ability to manage such conflict within the confines of the rule of law".