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REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

(f) BRIEFING ON GOVERNANCE AS AN ELEMENT OF THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

**Report of the side event, *Measuring Democratic Governance: The art of the possible*,
held at the 8th session of the UN Open Working Group on
the Sustainable Development Goals**

6 February 2014, New York

Co-organized by the IPU, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the United Nations, this event was designed to advance the idea of a stand-alone goal on democratic governance in the run-up to negotiations on the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations. A short event held over the lunch hour, it was strategically timed to coincide with the debate of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals on governance and the rule of law.

Some 50 people participated from the UN community, including several country representatives who were directly involved in the Open Working Group's deliberations. Presentations were made by Mr. Anders Johnsson, IPU Secretary General, Ms. Margot Wallström, Chair of the International IDEA Board of Advisers, Ambassador Od Och, Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations, Mr. Andy Richardson, IPU Resource Centre, and Mr. Nicholas Leader, Governance and Public Administration Advisor, UNDP. Dr. Massimo Tommasoli, Permanent Observer of International IDEA to the United Nations, moderated.

The overarching argument that emerged from the discussion was that the idea that governance could not be measured, which was commonly held when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established, is no longer valid. Thanks to the fresh research and empirical analyses carried out in the intervening years, a number of targets and indicators have been developed that actually measure a country's progress toward democratic governance.

Another main argument was that *democratic* governance, as opposed to mere *governance*, involved a qualitative leap from the common understanding of this issue in narrowly defined administrative terms. Democratic governance has to do with the application of democratic principles of participation, transparency and accountability to sound and effective decision-making and implementation at all levels.

Ambassador Od Och highlighted Mongolia's experience of the establishment of a national ninth millennium development goal – to strengthen human rights and foster democratic governance – with both indicators and monitoring mechanisms to evaluate work done on achieving the goal. The experience of Mongolia should be looked at closely by other countries. It also shows that it is possible to measure democratic governance at a relatively low level of technical capacity.

Citing citizen-led assessments of the quality of democracy supported by International IDEA over the past decade, Margot Wallström noted how citizens' voices and ownership of political processes are strengthened when they have a say in monitoring institutions.

In his remarks, the IPU Secretary General stressed three main reasons why a stand-alone goal on democratic governance is necessary: first, it is what people all over the world are demanding, as demonstrations over the past few years have shown (Occupy Wall Street, etc.) and as global surveys are reporting (My World survey); second, while all agree that elements of democratic governance may eventually be added to the various SDGs, only a comprehensive stand-alone goal can generate the critical mass required to make a difference; third, a dedicated goal would sanction the concept, in no uncertain terms, that democratic governance is an end in itself, reflecting fundamental human rights principles, and not just a means to development.

The presentations by Mr. Richardson and Mr. Leader dwelled on the more technical aspects of the matter. Mr. Richardson in particular referred to a set of indicators being developed by the IPU to measure the strength of parliaments in key areas such as representation, transparency and accountability. He argued that parliamentary indicators could very well be included in a larger dashboard of indicators to track progress on the implementation of a governance goal.

The participants agreed that democracy cannot be exported or imported, and that national and regional contexts are crucial in determining which indicators would be most effective in each country. This meant that a balance had to be struck between the universal character of a stand-alone goal and the indicators selected in any one national context.

The participants also noted that the MDGs focused almost entirely on quantitative indicators, and called for the inclusion of perception-based, qualitative assessment methods in the new SDGs. They also emphasized the importance of civil society participation in all phases of framing and implementing the post-2015 development agenda.

Although attention focused on the role of democracy in political sustainability, some participants noted that democratic principles were needed to bolster the economic, social, environmental and cultural aspects of the post-2015 development agenda as well. Dr. Tommasoli suggested that targets and indicators essential to democratic governance could be included in other goals, such as a goal on tackling extreme inequalities proposed by Professor Joseph Stiglitz of Columbia University.

Among other things, the event helped highlight the role of parliament as a key institution of democratic governance alongside the public administration, state audit institutions, the courts and the entire justice system, the media, and watchdog organizations. It also helped highlight that both developing and developed countries suffered from a deficit of democratic governance, not just the former, as is often thought. Since the SDGs are supposed to apply to all countries, a dedicated goal on democratic governance would be appropriate.