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For democracy. For everyone.

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Report of the President

(a) On his activities since the 195th session of the Governing Council

Over the past six months, I have been in close contact with the Secretary General, who has consulted with me regularly on pressing issues. He and his staff have provided me with regular and insightful briefings on all events at which I represented the Organization in my capacity as President. I have also spoken out publicly on a number of occasions where I felt the voice of the IPU – as the world organization of parliaments - needed to be heard.

On 17 October 2014, the morning after my election as new IPU President, I addressed and chaired the proceedings of a Workshop on Good Nuclear Disarmament Practice, organized jointly by the IPU, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament and the World Future Council, at IPU Headquarters in Geneva.

I stated that nuclear disarmament was an issue of critical importance both to the IPU and to all parliaments and parliamentarians in the world. Indeed, they are the ones who can turn the vision of nuclear disarmament into a palpable reality. I outlined the various joint initiatives the IPU had undertaken with its partners on this agenda over the years, including seminars, roundtables and handbooks for parliamentarians. I also pointed out that the IPU membership had adopted resolutions on the issue in 2009 and 2014.

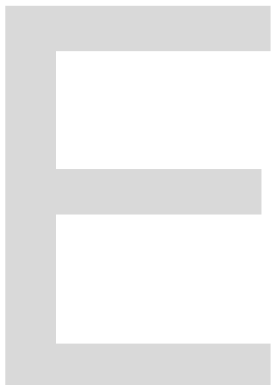
Those actions had led to greater awareness among the parliamentary community. I undertook to keep nuclear disarmament high on the IPU's agenda and to help build the political will and momentum needed to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

Later that day, the IPU Secretary General introduced me to his senior management team. They briefed me on the major issues that were currently on the IPU's radar screen and future meetings at which I could represent the IPU in my capacity as President.

On 31 October, on learning that the National Assembly of Burkina Faso had been dissolved, the IPU issued a press release calling for political dialogue and a swift return to constitutional rule. I stated that once again, parliament had fallen victim to the inability of the political class to find common ground to resolve conflict, upon which a peaceful and stable future for Burkina Faso depended.

I deplored the attack on the National Assembly and parliamentarians, underscoring that as the most legitimate forum for resolving political differences, parliament had to be protected. As representatives of the people, the physical integrity of the MPs also needed to be protected. The Organization was continuing to monitor the situation closely.

In another statement issued on 31 October, I welcomed the decision to re-open and once again allow Muslim worshippers access to the Al-Aqsa mosque, stating that it was an important acknowledgement of the right to worship and to access holy sites. In the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and rising tensions on both sides, I added that protecting such rights was critical for constructive relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The IPU's Committee for Middle East Questions continued to keep a close eye on developments in the region and was in regular contact with both sides in an effort to keep the channels of communication open.



On 17 and 18 November, I chaired the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament at UN Headquarters in New York. Given the countless challenges facing the world today, it was important for parliamentarians to be engaged both nationally with their constituents and internationally on global processes and to make the connection between the two levels.

The participants considered that the Fourth Speakers' Conference should ideally take place in the run-up to the UN Summit of Heads of State that would be adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They had an interactive debate with the UN Secretary-General, who reminded the participants of the crucial and credible role parliaments played in representing the voice of the people.

The participants also interacted with Ms. A. Mohammed, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on post-2015 development planning. She briefed the participants on the current state of negotiations on the SDGs and called for a robust parliamentary input. Mr. J. Eliasson, UN Deputy Secretary-General, spoke of the state of the world and the need to do more in terms of conflict prevention and resolution. He admitted that the United Nations was an imperfect organization and could not always solve all of the world's crises on its own. Ambassador Wenaweser of Liechtenstein, speaking on behalf of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) initiative, informed the Speakers about the need to reform the Security Council and the selection process of the UN Secretary-General.

The theme of the Speakers' Conference should be overarching and one that encompassed the elements of democracy, peace and development. The participants set the dates of their next meeting for 1 and 2 June and of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament for 31 August to 2 September 2015 at UN Headquarters in New York. The venue and timing would be particularly auspicious in view of the 70th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations.

The Secretary General and I took this opportunity to meet with the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to introduce him to the new IPU leadership. We discussed the revised IPU-UN cooperation agreement and ways of scaling up cooperation between our organizations, thus placing the partnership on a more solid footing. We also discussed collaboration on a number of priority areas for both the IPU and the United Nations, such as the SDGs and climate change.

The annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations was held on 19 and 20 November 2014, also at UN Headquarters in New York as is customary. The Hearing was an annual joint IPU-UN fixture on the calendars of both Organizations and was yet another way of moving towards a more strategic partnership. The theme of the 2014 edition was *Ensuring a people-centred approach to the new SDGs: A shared responsibility*. The underlying idea was to place people and their well-being first in the development paradigm rather than focus exclusively on economic gain.

In my opening remarks, I underscored that more and more aspects of human interaction were being commercialized because of the fundamentally flawed notion that ever growing production and consumption was the only way for an economy to function and for people to be happy. I followed with interest the interactive panel discussions moderated by leading journalists with discussants from the United Nations system and beyond. In conclusion, I stated that what needed to change in both developed and developing countries was the mind-set that we could grow fast now and worry about the consequences for human well-being and the planet later. We needed a more organic growth that went hand in hand with improved human well-being. I also reiterated that it was critical for parliamentarians and parliaments to plug into the UN processes and demonstrate leadership.

Marking the 16th anniversary of the assassination of Russian MP and human rights activist Galina Starovoitova on 20 November 2014, our Organization issued a press release urging greater effort in resolving cases of political assassinations. I stated that each instance of human rights violation was unacceptable at any time, any level and noted with great concern that defenders of human rights were themselves subjected to human rights violations. Those were an affront to democracy itself because they sought to intimidate and stifle political diversity and dissent.

To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, I noted in a statement that although there had been a slow but growing trend to end violence against women, there was a real dearth of legislation that specifically tackled violence against girls. The world needed to wake up and remedy the situation urgently and comprehensively. The IPU had a dedicated programme on combating violence against women. It organized awareness-raising campaigns and

assisted parliaments in drafting legislation to tackle this scourge. Parliaments had the responsibility and power to protect the girl child, for instance by changing the minimum marriage age to 18, keeping girls in school to delay marriage, or making sure existing laws were implemented effectively. MPs could and must make a difference to the lives of hundreds of millions of girls.

I travelled to Marrakech on 27 November at the invitation of the Moroccan authorities to address the Second World Human Rights Forum. In my opening remarks, I underscored that the IPU had been created in 1889 to promote peace and cooperation. Over the years, the Organization had worked tirelessly to strengthen democracy and promote human rights throughout the world. The IPU was founded on the premise that only dialogue and negotiation could truly lead to lasting peace and help resolve conflicts in a sustainable manner.

Parliaments played a pivotal role in representing the full diversity of society, holding the government to account for human rights abuses and other acts of non-compliance with their international commitments, and for passing laws to safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms. The IPU had been collaborating increasingly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, especially on implementation of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

On 8 December, the IPU co-organized with the Parliament of Peru a Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the meeting of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP20/CMP10) in Lima. Coming from Bangladesh, a country repeatedly ravaged by the forces of nature, climate change is very close to my heart. I was particularly honoured, therefore, to address the inaugural session and impress upon the MPs in attendance the urgency of achieving a universal and legally binding climate change pact by the time they met again in December 2015 in Paris.

There was no room left for scepticism on climate change; the scientific evidence was very compelling. I concluded by making an appeal to political leaders and decision-makers, including parliamentarians, to act decisively now in order not to fail future generations and the planet. The Parliamentary Meeting produced a consensus Outcome Document, which was conveyed to the UN Conference as a parliamentary input.

During the Parliamentary Meeting, I met with the President of the Congress of Peru and welcomed her Parliament's engagement with the IPU. I encouraged the parliamentary leadership to strengthen their cooperation with the IPU in future through a more structured approach.

In the sidelines of the COP20/CMP10 meeting, I met with the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Mr. Michel Jarraud, and discussed possible cooperation between our two organizations on the use of science/data to inform, shape and drive policy and action.

In January 2015, I led a parliamentary delegation from Bangladesh to Turkey. I used that opportunity to meet with the Chair of the Turkish IPU Group in Ankara and the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly. We reviewed and discussed cooperation on gender and the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for LCDs and they assured me of their continued support and engagement on both dossiers.

On 9 and 10 February 2015, at the invitation of the President of the UN General Assembly, I participated in a High-level Thematic Debate on "Means of Implementation for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda" at UN Headquarters in New York and moderated a session involving among others elected representatives at the national, city and local levels. In my address, I stated that unlike the MDGs process, where a careful and thorough analysis of the implementation requirements seemed to be lacking, serious thought must be given to the means of implementation of the SDGs.

In other words: how to turn goals on paper into reality through earmarking and proper use of resources. That was where the role of parliaments became so crucial as they held the public purse strings and could oversee the efficient use of public monies and official development assistance (ODA).

I added that harnessing resources for the SDGs necessarily implied reducing spending in some areas, such as defence, and ensuring an overall conducive policy environment through political stability, rule of law and effective governance, to name but a few. The underlying idea was that stronger parliaments

would make for more effective management of all means of implementation of the SDGs. That was behind the IPU's thinking when it had launched a campaign for the inclusion of democratic governance as a stand-alone goal and one that was mainstreamed throughout the other goals.

I also emphasized that 2015 was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set the world on the right track given that it was the year when three major international processes and agreements were to be agreed – disaster risk reduction in Sendai, Japan, in March, the SDGs in New York in September and climate change in Paris in December. How those processes interlocked and mutually reinforced each other would be critical and parliaments should connect the dots and seize the opportunity.

During my trip to New York, I met with the UN General Assembly-appointed Co-Facilitators for the post-2015 negotiations, the Permanent Representatives of Ireland and Kenya. We discussed the IPU's campaign to press for a goal on democratic governance and the importance of providing for a formal role for parliamentarians in the crucial implementation phase of the SDGs. I encouraged them to include a specific reference to parliaments and the IPU in the Declaration accompanying the adoption of the SDGs.

I also attended in New York a briefing at the International Peace Institute by Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia, on the work of the Independent Commission on Multilateralism (ICM). I encouraged the Commission to also consider the relationship between the United Nations and parliaments in its scope of work and conveyed the IPU's readiness to assist and facilitate in that endeavour.

On 21 February, I paid tribute to martyrs of Bangladesh's Language Movement at the Shaheed Minar in observance of the UN-proclaimed International Mother Language Day. I issued a statement emphasizing that language was a fundamental component of freedom of expression and a tool that brought and bonded people together.

On 13 March 2015, I participated in the Parliamentary Meeting organized jointly by the IPU and UNISDR on the occasion of the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan. The Meeting focused on governance and legislation on disaster risk reduction. In my opening address, I underscored the valuable work the IPU had done.

The Organization had adopted a resolution in March 2014 on *Towards risk-resilient development: Taking into consideration demographic trends and natural constraints*. That instrument was essentially a call to parliaments to tackle disaster risk through robust parliamentary action on all fronts – legislation, governance and advocacy for resilience-based development. I stressed the value of showcasing good practices and sharing experiences in effective legislation and good governance. The pivotal role of parliaments and their members was unquestionable in both areas.

Since taking up office in October 2014, I have been reaching out to individuals and institutions, such as Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York City, and Bloomberg Philanthropies, Lord Nicholas Stern, Chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, and Professor Jeffrey Sachs of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. My approaches have been made with a view to raising the IPU's profile and securing the engagement of these personalities and their institutes in the IPU in the coming years.