



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Presidential statement on the state of democracy in the world today

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We are witnessing a worrying trend around the world: parliaments as institutions are coming under assault and Members of Parliaments are finding themselves increasingly under threat. As your President, I have spoken out against such events, which I consider to be attacks on democracy itself.

In many of these situations, the causes or symptoms of the crisis are similar: freedom of expression is under attack, making it very difficult for parliamentarians, the press and civil society to speak out against abuses; the powers of parliaments are undermined by the other branches of government: the executive and the judiciary; national election commissions are not functioning properly and are seen as instruments of the government to ensure their stay in power, and rampant corruption undermines basic notions of equality before the law and of accountable and well-managed public finances.

In this respect, I wish to denounce in the strongest terms the assassination of Ms. Daphne Caruana Galizia, a well-known journalist and researcher from Malta who led the Panama Papers investigations. We must speak out in defence of investigative journalism and in defence of the brave men and women journalists around the world who risk life and limb to bring us the facts. We express our sympathy and solidarity with the family of Ms. Galizia, who paid the ultimate price for denouncing corruption.

At a time when dialogue is most needed to resolve crises, we are seeing delegations coming to our Assemblies that do not represent the full spectrum of political views in the parliament. Members of Parliament are being targeted through threats, reprisals and other forms of intimidation, and political space is shrinking in many countries. I call for the release of Mr. Kem Sokha and all political prisoners, the safe return of all Cambodian MPs in exile, and an end to attacks on civil society and independent media. The report of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is illustrative of this worrisome trend.

I am deeply concerned by the political situation in Cambodia, where criminal proceedings are allegedly being used to silence the opposition and prevent it from playing a meaningful role in the lead-up to the elections in 2018. Equally disturbing is the situation in the Maldives, where diminishing freedoms and a schism between the ruling party and the opposition are taking on troubling dimensions and are disrupting the functioning of the parliament.

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In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the parliament's powers are being usurped and the principle of the separation of powers of the State is being undermined. Members of Parliament complain of harassment and intimidation by the authorities for merely discharging their duties. Violence has broken out due to seemingly irreconcilable differences between the ruling party and the opposition-led parliament and the economy is on a downward spiral, causing great suffering for the people of Venezuela. We stand in unequivocal solidarity with the institution of parliament and the National Assembly of Venezuela. The situation in Yemen has become a woeful humanitarian catastrophe, claiming thousands of innocent lives. The rift between opposing factions has led to a divided institution of parliament, a war-torn country and untold suffering for the Yemeni people. We are, however, heartened by the commitment expressed by the MPs of both factions of parliament to facilitate access to humanitarian assistance.

The IPU brings together the global community of parliaments. As members of this community, we are bound together by shared values and principles. Many of these are enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Democracy (<http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>) whose 20th anniversary we celebrated last month. We must stand up in defence of the fundamental values and principles articulated in this Declaration; we must practise what we preach, upholding the spirit and the letter of democracy and its ideals. We must continue to be the torchbearers of tolerance, political dialogue and peaceful solutions. We must never forget that before all else we have been elected to serve the interests of our people and their aspirations for a life of dignity and opportunity, in peace and safety.

We have a tried and tested tool at our disposal – parliamentary diplomacy. We have used it on many occasions in the past: during the Cold War, in the years leading up to the Helsinki process on security and cooperation in Europe, and then later through the establishment of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. We are employing it today in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the IPU promoting projects of peace for the region. The meetings facilitated at our Assemblies between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot political parties are yet another concrete example of the constructive and preventive nature of parliamentary diplomacy, and its ability to defuse or avert tensions through peaceful means.

Parliaments and parliamentarians of the world, I call on you to fly the flag high through your words, but more importantly, through your deeds. I appeal to you to speak out every time the institution you embody and your parliamentary peers come under attack in one form or another. The IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has been doing this for decades. It is at times like these that we must stand together in a display of parliamentary solidarity. History will judge us harshly if we fail to do so. I entreat each and every one of us, therefore, to sign up to the IPU campaign in defence of democracy.

I would like to express our heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with the islands in the Caribbean which have felt the full onslaught of recent hurricanes and natural disasters. In a similar show of parliamentary solidarity, I appeal to parliaments to provide assistance or cause assistance to be provided to these small island developing States as they recover and try to rebuild.

Lastly, I would like to restate the IPU's strong commitment to a nuclear-weapons-free world. The IPU was founded on the fundamental principle of resolving differences through peaceful means and political dialogue. The Organization has always advocated for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament yet there are still countries in the world that do not respect United Nations Security Council resolutions prohibiting nuclear testing. Given the devastating impacts, including humanitarian, of a nuclear event, whether by accident, miscalculation or design that cannot be limited in time and space, the global parliamentary community must stand firm and work together towards the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons.