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## Inaugural address by IPU President Saber Hossain Chowdhury

**132<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly,  
National Assembly of Viet Nam**  
Hanoi, 28 March 2015

Bimillahir Rahmanir Rahim

H.E. Mr. Trương Tấn Sang, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,  
H.E. Mr. Nguyen Sinh Hung, President of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,  
Hon. Speakers of Parliaments, Heads of Delegations and fellow Parliamentarians,  
Government and parliamentary officials of Viet Nam,  
Members of the diplomatic corps, International Organizations, Special guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamalaikum and Good Evening

***Niyet liyet Chao mung den Hanoi.***

I am honoured to address the inaugural ceremony of IPU's 132<sup>nd</sup> Assembly in this magnificent setting of the National Assembly and in presence of H.E. President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

This is my first such address as IPU President and I am delighted it is in my own backyard, Asia, and specifically in Viet Nam, the land of the ascending dragon, a nation of diverse and rich ethnic, religious and cultural heritage. Our congratulations to people of Viet Nam as they celebrate 70 years of independence and 40 years of unification.

First, allow me to express, on behalf of the IPU, our deepest appreciation to our hosts, the National Assembly of Viet Nam, for the exceptional arrangements. You have touched us deeply with the warmth and care of your hospitality. You have done everything possible to make our stay in your country as pleasant and as



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memorable as possible and for this, we are extremely grateful.

A global event of this magnitude requires months of meticulous planning and preparation and you have surpassed our expectations in many ways. We are honoured to be amongst the first truly global gatherings in this new Parliament and in fact in Viet Nam.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would wish to acknowledge all the delegations present here today and thank them for their attendance. Established in 1889 and well before the UN and League of Nations, IPU is the oldest political multilateral institution in the world. It stands proud and strong today with 166 Member parliaments having around 45,000 MPs representing 6.5 billion people round the world and it continues to strive for universal membership. Through the Hanoi Assembly, 90 million people of Viet Nam are thus reaching out to a global community of 6.5 billion people and we embrace you as our brothers and sisters.

I would like to welcome in particular three delegations amongst us at this Assembly in an observer capacity – those of Fiji, Brunei and Nauru. It is our sincere hope that you will enjoy our Assembly, see the benefits of being a member of the IPU and join our family.

Our hosts have focussed not only on arrangements and organisation of the Assembly, but they have also actively engaged in its substance. The theme for our General Debate in this Assembly – appropriately chosen by our hosts - is both timely and topical: *“The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning Words into Action”*.

Having crossed the planetary boundaries of environmental safety, we are now at a critical crossroads – do we continue to follow our model of development at growing threat to humanity or do we instead combine economic prosperity with social justice and protection of earth, our only home? GDP by itself is not good enough and we need to keep our focus on prosperity, inclusion and sustainability as well.

In all we do and all we strive for, the centrality of people is paramount and this is why we at the IPU have all along been strongly advocating for people centred development. We cannot afford to have any disconnect between the SDGs and the aspirations of the people.

This is a very exciting and challenging time for us as Parliamentarians



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– a new Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was agreed just this month in Sendai and it refers specifically to the important role of Parliaments and that of the IPU in its implementation, a new set of development goals – the SDGs – will be adopted in September this year at the UN Summit of Heads of States and Government and in Paris in December we must reach agreement on climate change.

Coherence and convergence of these three international processes is critical and how they interlock, connect and mutually reinforce each other will to a large extent determine the future we aspire to. It is also an opportunity for us, as parliamentarians, to make our voices heard and play a robust oversight role at the implementation stage.

IPU has campaigned over past two years for inclusion of democratic governance as a stand-alone SDG goal and one that is mainstreamed throughout all the others. Elements of governance have indeed been retained in the current draft of the SDGs and this is positive.

A major shortcoming of the MDGs is precisely that they were not premised on requirement for strong institutions of governance as prime movers of development. It is our sincere hope that this time around, the global community will give democracy and governance due importance in the development paradigm as these are goals in their own right as well as a means to achieving other goals.

Through functions of representation, legislation, appropriation of resources and robust oversight, we, as members of parliament, have the power to make a real difference and we will continue to press our governments to make sure that ambitions for the SDGs and aspirations of our constituents become a reality. We need to engage actively and take action on the post-2015 development agenda by tracking progress and monitoring implementation at the national level.

We will be focusing on the post 2015 agenda again later this year when we convene for the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament at UN Headquarters in New York, mere weeks before the SDGs come to life. We are aiming to make this Summit a milestone in the history of parliaments' contribution to global governance.

Reaching out to young people and connecting with the youth is also an important area of work for the IPU and through the upcoming World Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Tokyo in May – a joint event IPU and the Japanese Diet - we will be advancing this agenda further.



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Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a rich variety of topics to consider in Hanoi: from cyber warfare to water governance and the complex relationship between sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs of States, and human rights.. Other topics up for discussion are democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms, maternal and child health and child protection 25 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We will also be devoting some time to reviewing our important and evolving cooperation with the United Nations and drawing up the outlines of a new strategic partnership.

2015 is a pivotal year for the United Nations as it celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and this provides us with an opportunity for stock-taking, reviewing, learning lessons and reenergizing The IPU stands ready to contribute to this.

2015 is also a special year for the IPU as it marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Meeting of Women Parliamentarians. The IPU continues to be a leader in promoting gender equality and a fervent advocate of greater women's representation in politics.

The first IPU assembly when we had men and women was in 1921 when we had two women MPs. In Hanoi we have 200 women MPs. We have come a long way but need to do more and go further.

In the same vein, 2015 signals 20 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform and Plan of Action. The Women's Meeting will thus take stock of progress and setbacks and look ahead to a promising future. We are sadly still a far cry from achieving gender equality and the 30-percent mark for women's representation in parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world faces a number of challenges and threats. One of them is terrorism and violent extremism and It is not surprising, therefore, that the common thread of several proposals received for the Emergency Item is terrorism.

No country or region is immune to terrorism and only coordinated global efforts can succeed in countering such a global threat. It is my hope that as a global parliamentary community we can bring a meaningful contribution to these efforts.



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Defending human rights of MPs who defend the human right of others continues to be a priority for the IPU and during this Assembly we will continue to examine and report on cases.

Fellow parliamentarians, there are so many issues we can and should get involved in: nuclear disarmament, climate change, disaster risk reduction, peace building and national reconciliation, and the list goes on. As representatives of the people, we are duty-bound to serve our constituents and ratify international commitments that are in the interest of our people. We have an obligation to hold government up to scrutiny and to hold ourselves up to the highest standards of probity.

We can and need to lead by example. We should never underestimate our individual and collective power to be a change for better.

All eyes are on you as members of parliament, and on us as your global organization, to deliver on democracy, on development and on a peaceful world. As Parliaments we can indeed shape and create the world we all want to live in and in the process leave behind a better world for the child to be born tomorrow.

For attending Delegates, the 132<sup>nd</sup> Assembly provides you with a great opportunity to network and engage with fellow parliamentarians from around the world, share and enhance your perspectives and knowledge on best practices and finally use this to enrich the lives and livelihoods of the people you represent – engage, enhance and enrich.

I hope to meet with as many of you as possible during the course of this Assembly and am always available and accessible.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by expressing my hope and belief that not only will our Hanoi Assembly be remembered for the wonderful hospitality of our gracious Hosts, the very high standards of organisation and management, the warmth of the friendly people of Viet Nam, the support and solidarity of the Government of Viet Nam but also by the depth and clarity of the substance it generates by way of Hanoi Declaration and other outcomes.

I wish you all a successful and defining Assembly.

**kahm uhn / Thank you.**