



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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133rd IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 17 – 21.10.2015

Inaugural address by the IPU President, Mr. Saber Chowdhury

Sunday, 18 October 2015

IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong,
Heads of UN organizations,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament,
Distinguished members of parliament,
Special guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 133rd IPU Assembly in Geneva. This Assembly promises to have a distinctive youthful flavour as you will soon discover, and in this regard I would like to acknowledge among us the President of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU, Mr. Al-Tenajji. Equally important are our women parliamentary peers and I would like to recognize the presence of the President of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, Ms. Mensah-Williams.

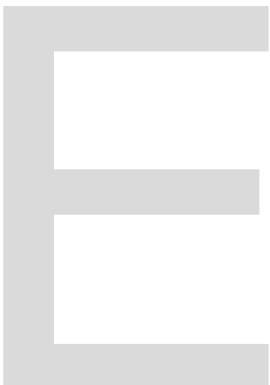
Ladies and gentlemen,

One year ago, almost to the day, you elected me as your President right in this very room. So for me, this Assembly marks a milestone in more than one ways. Upon my election, I pledged to deliver on issues that were close to our Members' hearts and to render our structures more efficient. It is my hope that at this Assembly, you will see that I, along with the Secretary General and a dedicated Secretariat, have been working to fulfil those pledges.

The last time we met, in Hanoi, we debated "The SDGs: Turning words into reality". I am pleased to tell you that we have now finally achieved recognition of our role as parliaments in the whole process. As you are all aware, the SDGs were formally adopted a couple of weeks ago at the UN Summit in New York, on the heels of our very successful Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, also focusing on the SDGs.

I am pleased to inform you that, thanks to your vigorous lobbying, a very strong and clear reference to the role of parliaments in the implementation phase of the SDGs was included in the UN outcome document on the SDGs. Furthermore, Goal 16 – the governance goal – was adopted, also as a result of your powers of persuasion. I wish to thank all of you for doing your part to ensure a parliamentary contribution to the SDGs.

The challenge for us, now that the SDGs do actually exist, is how we, as parliaments, can help achieve them, and the broader post-2015 development agenda, in concrete terms. We cannot sit back and consider that our job is done. On the contrary, it has only just begun. I put it to you, as IPU Members, to devise creative and innovative ways in each of your parliaments, to set about implementing the various components of this agenda. As an Organization, we are here to guide you and will reflect the new SDGs in our next roadmap, the new Strategy that will steer the IPU as of 2017. As a first step, we have developed a sample resolution on the SDGs that can be adopted by parliaments at the national level.



We will need to factor into our work and indeed our budget for the coming years the three major international processes that fall under this post-2015 development agenda: the SDGs, disaster risk reduction and climate change. If not, these will all remain a dead letter and will serve no purpose whatsoever. We must infuse life into them and channel sufficient resources and energy into making them tangible realities.

We look to you for your vision and leadership on these important processes. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to remind you of a forthcoming landmark event on the international calendar - the Climate Change Conference that will be taking place in Paris on 5-6 December this year. Please mark it in your own calendars as we will be organizing a Parliamentary Meeting in this occasion in cooperation with the French Parliament and unveiling a forward-looking Parliamentary Plan of Action on Climate Change. We are counting on each and every one of you to participate in this event and help devise ambitious action plans in your own parliaments.

Fellow parliamentarians,

We meet under an overall theme that we can all identify with in our different parts of the world: migration. Through our deliberations, we will be examining “The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration”. I should tell you that when this theme was chosen several months ago, the IPU had no idea that migration would be so topical, nor that it would become a challenge of such proportions as it is today. Notwithstanding this, migration is a very real human tragedy that affects us all, directly or indirectly, in one way or the other. Three of the four emergency items we have received thus far deal with one of the major consequences of migration – the refugee crisis.

Another recurrent theme at this Assembly is terrorism, which is rearing its ugly head across the world. To tackle this scourge from the global parliamentary perspective, the IPU is initiating collaboration and developing synergies with the United Nations at the highest level and will be holding events on this topic at this Assembly.

These are being organized in follow-up to the resolution on the emergency item adopted in Hanoi on “The role of parliaments in combating all terrorist acts perpetrated by organizations such as Daesh and Boko Haram against innocent civilians, in particular women and girls” and I encourage you all to participate in them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hinted to you at the start of my speech that this Assembly would have a youthful hint. Let me elaborate. I am pleased to announce that in addition to the work of the Forum of Young MPs, the IPU has been reaching out to the Graduate Institute of Geneva, the University of Geneva and to even younger schoolchildren. So do not be surprised if you see a number of youngsters in the Conference Centre over the next few days – they are our future and we need to include them and listen to them.

At this juncture, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to say a special word of thanks to our gracious Swiss hosts. As an Organization, the IPU owes its very existence to Switzerland and is proud to be hosted by Geneva for the second Assembly of the year. Switzerland has not only given us a home, but also illustrious former IPU Secretaries-General and a strong ally in the Swiss Parliament. We also enjoy good relations and have undertaken a number of joint initiatives with the local authorities of Geneva.

Fellow parliamentarians,

The IPU is proud of the growing strategic partnership with the UN and looks forward to signing a new cooperation agreement with it in the months to come. As testimony of the strengthening ties between our organizations, four heads of UN agencies: Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, Mr. William Lacy-Swing, Director-General of the International Organization for Migration, Mr. Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour

Organization, Mr. Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, and Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Director-General of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, will be addressing our Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We will be adopting a resolution on “Democracy in the digital era and the threat to democracy and individual rights”. These topics are all close to our hearts and the work we do as members of parliament. It is my hope that this resolution will find broad consensus among our Members and be adopted so as to provide a solid framework for future follow-up action by parliaments.

I am pleased to announce that we will be welcoming a new Member to the IPU fold at this assembly – the Parliament of Fiji. We will also be receiving an observer delegation from the parliaments of Vanuatu and Comoros with a view to their future affiliation. We are slowly but surely heading towards our goal of universal membership and look forward to welcoming other parliaments from the Pacific and the Caribbean in the not-too-distant future. We will also be welcoming two new Observers – Liberal International and Parliamentarians for Non-proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament. I am certain that they will bring their own expertise and value-added to bear to our work as an organization.

On this final note I wish you fruitful deliberations and an Assembly crowned with success.

Thank you.