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Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs,
Ms. S. Dev (India), Mr. N. Schrijver (Netherlands), and
Mr. I. Umakhanov (Russian Federation)***

1. The resolution: *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*, proposed for adoption at the 137th IPU Assembly, is based on the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Declaration on Minorities and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on human rights. Issues concerning democracy have been raised regularly by IPU resolutions including those on human rights (2004), civil society (2005), universal democratic and electoral standards (2007), freedom of expression and the right to information (2009), youth participation in the democratic process (2010), citizen engagement in democracy (2013), democracy in the digital era (2015), women's political participation (2016), the threat posed by terrorism to democracy and human rights (2016), as well as the IPU's Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments (2012).

2. In preparing the resolution, the co-Rapporteurs drew on contributions from experts and parliamentarians, which were made during a hearing at the 136th IPU Assembly (Dhaka, April 2017). The co-Rapporteurs would like to thank all concerned for their valuable contributions and insights, which helped them to draft the resolution. The co-Rapporteurs also would like to thank Professor André Liebich from the Graduate Institute of Geneva for his direct and concrete considerations to the modern problems of democracy made during the co-Rapporteurs' meeting held on 1 June 2017.

3. The resolution appeals directly to national parliaments and parliamentarians as representatives of the people. The co-Rapporteurs note that parliaments today, as the central institution of democracy, embody the will of the people in government, and carry all expectations that democracy will be truly responsive to peoples' needs and that parliaments can help solve the most pressing problems confronting people in their daily lives. Also, elections are not standalone events but are only the start of a process of democratization and true representation. As the key legislative organ, parliaments have the task of adapting society's laws to its rapidly changing needs and circumstances. As the body entrusted with the oversight of government, they are responsible for ensuring that governments are transparent and fully accountable to the people.

4. Democracy needs a system of checks and balances, and accountability. Within the traditional separation of power - between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary - parliament, as the freely elected body, holds a central place in any democracy. It is the institution through which the will of the people is expressed, and through which popular self-government is realized in practice. As representatives of the people, parliaments represent them when dealing with the other branches of government. How well they fulfil this mediating role in modern relations and how representative of the people they are in all their diversity are important considerations for any modern democracy.

5. Parliaments not only represent citizens as individuals but through the presence of political parties they also represent individuals collectively to serve the common interest and to promote certain broad tendencies. The co-Rapporteurs agreed that political parties are essential to a vibrant and viable democratic system.

6. The co-Rapporteurs fully acknowledge the significance of the IPU's 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy and take note of the world parliamentary community's extensive use of the Declaration. The co-Rapporteurs agree that democracy is both an ideal and a set of institutions as described in the Universal Declaration on Democracy.

7. The resolution states that there is no single model of democracy in the world, that democracy is not the exclusive privilege of a single country, group of countries or a region, and that democracy reflects the diversity of experiences and cultural particularities, without departing from internationally recognized principles, norms and standards.

8. The co-Rapporteurs state that in the modern world democracy faces new challenges. Digital media and social networks are both sources of new opportunities and threats. The world has to underscore the need to safeguard and promote the fundamental right of privacy and the right to determine the disclosure and uses of one's own personal data.

9. The resolution urges parliaments to step up their efforts to achieve equality between men and women in decision-making. For instance, the worldwide average of women in national parliaments increased from 22.6 per cent in 2015 to 23.3 per cent by the end of 2016. Ten years ago, women held 16.8 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world - a 6.5 percentage point gain over the last decade. However, the rate of progress has stabilized in recent years, underlining the need for relentless efforts in order to achieve gender balance in politics. In the resolution the co-Rapporteurs call on IPU Member Parliaments to renew their efforts to implement the provisions of all IPU resolutions related to democracy as well as the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments and request the IPU to monitor and regularly report on progress as part of the Organization's overall strategy to promote democracy.

10. The co-Rapporteurs reaffirm the importance for democracy of the following Sustainable Development Goals - Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 10 (reduced inequalities) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The co-Rapporteurs further underline that democratic principles must also be applied to inter-State relations and international organizations, as stated in a dedicated section of the Universal Declaration on Democracy.

11. The co-Rapporteurs note the tension between direct democracy and representative democracy and encourage parliaments to continue to seek ways to address the issue. The resolution reaffirms that the IPU needs to continue to support efforts of parliaments to strengthen democracy and ensure good governance.

12. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, which was established on 30 June 1889, was conceived from the beginning as an open forum, a place where parliamentarians from different countries and different political parties could meet and exchange views. With 173 Members in 2017, the IPU is still growing, reflecting the global demand for democracy. In commemoration of the creation of the IPU and its first Assembly, the resolution invites the UN to study the possibility of designating 30 June as the International Day of Parliamentarism.