



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

No Real Democracy Without Strong Political Opposition, International Day for Democracy

Geneva, 12 September 2013 – Countries around the world are too often stifling political opposition instead of embracing it as a tangible and natural sign of a healthy democracy, says the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ahead of International Day of Democracy on 15 September.

Whether through political parties, mass public dissent or other means, a vibrant political opposition remains a core pillar of true democracy, allowing expression to all voices and opinions within society. However, IPU argues, it is often seen as a threat that has to be stamped out, with tragic and violent results.

“The horrific violence and breakdown in Egypt and Syria, and recent mass demonstrations in several other countries are witness to what happens when people are denied a political voice and are shut out from the political decision-making,” says IPU President Abdelwahad Radi. “Peace, based on social inclusion and cohesion, and democracy are inextricably linked. One cannot exist without the other.”

Marking the International Day, which this year is focusing on “*strengthening voices for democracy*”, IPU underlines the urgent need to protect freedom of expression and to encourage and ensure political engagement from within all sections of society.

“Inclusive politics based on a healthy respect for differences is the solution to the many conflicts and crises the world is facing today,” adds Radi.

As an important first step, IPU urges governments to genuinely commit to protecting MPs as they do their work, regardless of their political affiliation. Large numbers of MPs around the world are being targeted, intimidated and at times killed for speaking out, defending the rights of those that have elected them or for differences in political opinion.

On average each year, IPU’s Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is working on cases involving close to 300 MPs in more than 40 countries whose lives and livelihood are being threatened. More than 75 per cent of these MPs are from the official opposition. In 2012, more than 13 per cent of the human rights cases IPU was working on involved the killing of MPs and 48 per cent on their arbitrary arrest and detention.

The Organization also underscores the importance of respecting the right to peaceful assembly for all. Despite generalized voter apathy across the world, public disillusionment with the business of politics and political status quo, anger over the impact of the financial crisis or the

simple exclusion from political decisions and processes have led to dramatic numbers of people taking to the streets in several regions of the world.

“Whilst it may be difficult for the political leadership to face such public protest, they are a legitimate expression of public feeling on any question. Outside of the ballot box, it is often the only way for an electorate to be heard and hopefully, listened to,” says Radi. “Citizens the world over need to be confident that they can assemble, speak out or question without fear of reprisal or violence. Their faith in democracy rests on that.”

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