



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

5, CHEMIN DU POMMIER
CASE POSTALE 330
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GENÈVE (SUISSE)

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - FAX (41.22) 919 41 60 - E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS : INTERPARLEMENT GENEVE

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Statement by Mr. Abdelwahad Radi

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

“We must ensure that democracy and its institutions are truly inclusive and able to solve today’s problems through dialogue”

Fifteen years ago in Cairo, we all signed up to the IPU Universal Declaration on Democracy in which we stated that democracy was both a universally recognized ideal and a goal to attain. Among the first fundamentals we acknowledged was that without respect for plurality of views in politics, there could be no democracy.

Plurality of views means including all voices in the political debate. All voices means all people – men-women, young-old, rich-poor, minorities and indigenous peoples. The Declaration embodied this belief - that people are all equal with an equal right to participate in public affairs in order to take their destiny into their hands.

They exercise this right through us.

Clearly plurality of views can also lead to confrontation. This is an acceptable price to pay for democracy. But what separates democracy from other political philosophies is the principle and practice of solving differences first and foremost through dialogue.

We know this better than anyone. The daily life of a parliament is made up of diverse views and dialogue to reach mutual compromise, agreement, because in politics, no one holds the truth – and the ability to listen and understand is sometimes as, if not more, important than our ability to speak. It underlines a fundamental notion of democracy – respect of the other.

The Arab Spring is a tragic reminder of the critical importance of political integration and dialogue to both peace and democracy.

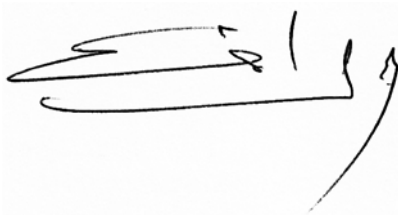
People have not taken to the streets and at times, taken up arms and paid with their life, to replace one form of dictatorship with another. What they are demanding and what has to be delivered is a system that brings everyone into the political fold and for all citizens to participate in political dialogue at the national and local levels through free and fair elections and through elected representatives.

This is as true everywhere else as it is in the Arab world. Parliaments can never afford to forget this. A 2008 global poll emphasized the importance of democracy to the vast majority of the people. It found that 85 per cent of people believed that the “will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government”. It is a belief that represents a huge potential for the world. And for its future.

Yet that potential will not be realized until voters’ trust in parliaments and in their elected representatives reaches a certain level of reliability. It is a stark reality that mustn’t just be admitted, but also addressed. A first step is with parliament improving its own performance and reaching out to its people and, for parliamentarians, practising a policy of being close to their constituents. Next they must include and engage in dialogue with the very people who have elected them on the decisions that fundamentally affect all aspects of their life. That is democracy in action.

The IPU-UNDP Global Parliamentary Report has found that in the past 10 years, all parliaments have in some way reached out to electorates. In general, there is much more information on parliamentary activity. Some are engaging citizens more directly in parliamentary processes, including holding public consultations. But for them to have any real meaning, there has to be follow-up in constitutions and daily life. For example, Article 14 of the 2011 Moroccan Constitution grants citizens “the right to bring legislative proposals”.

As parliamentarians we know our constituents’ expectations of us have never been greater – despite their numerous criticisms of parliaments and politicians. We remain the most important contact in relations between citizens and parliament, not forgetting our oversight and legislative roles. Our dialogue and engagement with all our voters not only brings democracy alive but humanizes it. And that’s how problems are solved – through “the democratic way”.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a cursive name.

Abdelwahad Radi
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union