



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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## Perspectives on the state of democracy

International Day of Democracy

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### Opening remarks by Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Michael Møller, who could not be here, and the State Chancellor of Geneva, Mrs. Anja Wyden Guelpa, I am very pleased to welcome you to this interactive dialogue on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy.

Today, we are joining a global conversation involving governments, parliaments, civil society, academics and ordinary citizens, about the nature and form of the democracies that they are trying to create. This tripartite venture between government, parliament and local authorities should be cross-cutting across all democracies.

There is no denying that democracy is facing difficult times. Democracy is under attack in many parts of the world. Frustrations are evident, with democracy seemingly struggling to address the numerous demands and challenges facing populations, such as rising inequality, lack of respect for human rights, closing spaces for civil society and threats to peace and security.

Yet by its very nature, democracy is resilient, and capable of adapting to changing times and circumstances. Most importantly, people continue to value the fundamental premise of democracy, that everyone has an equal right to take part in the decisions that affect their lives. As long as this democratic ideal is alive, we can be confident that solutions can be found to any challenge.

I would like to underline the significance of gathering here today the international, national and local dimensions of democracy.

The international organizations in Geneva contribute to peace and democracy through their work on human rights, institution building and good governance, but also on setting norms in different areas, for example on 'democracy' in the workplace, where the International Labour Organization has the lead.

Meanwhile, the local level is where democracy is practiced on a day-to-day basis, and where citizens can most easily make their voice heard to their elected representatives. I would particularly like to recognize the leadership provided by the State Chancellor of Geneva, Mrs. Anja Wyden Guelpa, in organizing the Geneva Democracy Week for the third consecutive year.

And of course national parliaments, which play a crucial bridging role by aggregating local interests into national policies, but also by domesticating international priorities such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda offers a clear opportunity for a transformative shift in people's well-being, and spells out that democratic values and effective institutions are essential to achieving development goals. Here again, Geneva, as the operational hub of the international system, plays a crucial role in the implementation of the SDGs. It is parliament's job, after all, to leave no one behind.

I very much look forward to the range of perspectives that our distinguished panellists bring to this debate on the state of democracy. But before we begin, allow me to use this opportunity to show a short video on the 20th anniversary of one of the IPU's

unique achievements – the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Democracy in September 1997.

The Universal Declaration represents a landmark because it was the first time that State institutions from so many different countries were able to agree on the constituent elements of democracy, including basic democratic principles such as human rights, the rule of law and gender equality. This embodies the international dimension of democracy.

The Declaration clearly articulates that democracy is the only political system capable of self-correction. As such, democracy ensures that governments are responsive to the diverse aspirations of their citizens. On this International Day of Democracy, we should remember that stronger democracies are the ultimate response to the challenges of a turbulent and uncertain world. That is why we are here today: to address these challenges to democracy.

Let us now take a minute to watch the video. Thank you.