



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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# **Address by Mr. Martin Chungong Secretary General of the IPU Delivered at the opening ceremony of the second regular session of the National Assembly**

Porto-Novo  
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President of the National Assembly,  
Chairpersons of institutions,  
Members of Government,  
Deputies,  
The prefect of Oueme,  
Mayor of Porto Novo,  
Members of the diplomatic corps,  
Representatives of international organizations,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my great pleasure at being here with you today, and at the same time, my gratitude for the invitation and the genuinely warm welcome I have received since my arrival in Cotonou.

My visit to Benin, which has been in the diary for a while but postponed a number of times because of other commitments, has finally come to fruition. I would like to thank the President of the National Assembly for all of his efforts to enable this project to become a reality.

This is the first time that I have addressed elected officials in this chamber, a chamber dedicated to the discussion of ideas resulting in decisions that affect the lives of all those in society. However, this is far from my first contact with Benin and some of its political officials with whom I have cooperated closely in the course of my work at the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The IPU, for its part, has benefited from the substantial contribution of its representatives from Benin; one of the best examples of this has to be the regional conference “Towards enhanced parliamentary action to combat the trafficking of children for purposes of labour exploitation in West and Central Africa” hosted in May 2010 by the National Assembly of Benin with about 100 participants. The main outcomes on combating this scourge adopted at the meeting continue to serve as a reference today and provided inspiration for participants in the follow-up seminar held at the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja at the end of May 2016.

Mr. President, I would like to commend this laudable investment and your continued interest, availability and support, which I greatly appreciate and hope will continue. Benin is well known for its vibrant democracy and I fully subscribe to the idea of free speech in Benin, which is the reflection of freedom of expression, one of the tenets of democracy. In addition, alternation, good governance, the smooth functioning of institutions in accordance with the rule of law, accountability, and a dynamic civil society are all essential for democracy to take root and flourish and are finding fertile ground in your country through the efforts of actors driven by a sense of responsibility and working for the common good. This is, I think, the secret to the vitality of the democracy in Benin; the success of recent electoral consultations is a good example of this.

All this is down to the work of the sociopolitical and economic actors in Benin, namely you, the parliamentarians, who work tirelessly to generate new momentum to make democracy enduring for the benefit of those you have the privilege to represent. However, I am convinced of the need for ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy in Benin, however effective it may be. This is consistent with the very principle of democracy and will enable it to respond appropriately to the manifold challenges that are reflected in the many and pressing expectations of your voters.

Elected by the people, you are also guardians of their human rights.

As part of your prerogatives in law making, budgetary voting and overseeing the actions of government, you have the responsibility for transposing international and regional norms in the area of human rights into national legislation, allocating sufficient resources for the implementation of related policies and programmes and ensuring their implementation. Sessions, such as the one opening today, provide an opportunity to put the case for further resources to implement priority activities. The IPU has been working for a number of years on involving parliaments in the work of the Human Rights Council. This United Nations mechanism is responsible, through its Universal Periodic Review, for ensuring that States respect their human rights obligations. We mustn't hesitate in naming an issue, because this means identifying it, and then beginning the process of tackling it. I would like to encourage you to continue to favour dialogue and discussion – the preferred *modus operandi* of parliament – and to listen, particularly to your voters, so that Benin will continue to enjoy its reputation as a calm country.

I am sure that you will continue to look out for of the warning signs of conflict, which are generally frustrations born out of human rights violations. In this regard, the subject of the general debate at the 135th Assembly, which begins on 23 October in Geneva, is entitled "Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: parliaments as early responders". Parliamentarians from all over the world will be considering every possibility to develop a parliamentary contribution on defusing conflicts in a timely manner. I hope that the National Assembly of Benin will contribute to the discussion. As to equality between men and women, we all know the key role of women in our society. However, because of a desire to protect that may be too strong, women often take a back seat although their qualities should be valued and harnessed at all governance levels. It is incumbent upon you, as legislators, to strive to advance the

status of women, combat all forms of discrimination against women, and include women in all stages of decision-making. It goes without saying that I would like to see more women in this auditorium in the near future. I believe that women account for only 7 per cent of the national representation. Yet, the global average stands at around 23 per cent.

Young people are the future and should receive particular attention from you. They must have the tools to enable them to gradually become involved in political life and, like women, to be involved in the entire decision-making process.

The new agenda for sustainable development adopted last year consists of 17 goals and 167 targets aimed at realizing the most basic rights of populations. It includes the right to education, food, health, water, basic sanitation, decent work, social security, as well as civil and political rights concerning good administration and justice, political participation, freedom of expression and association and protection of the planet, and should serve to drive the programmes and policies of States over the next 15 years. There is a real correlation between democracy and development. Promoting accountability and the equitable distribution of resources, and fighting corruption should foster a healthy environment conducive to investment, and in time, boost the economy. Just as the enjoyment of basic economic rights should make it easier for populations to support efforts to promote the rule of law.

For you, elected representatives, the new development programme represents an ideal opportunity and offers a roadmap that should help parliaments to identify priorities to better meet the needs of the people.

The important means you have at your disposal as parliamentarians should enable you to contribute to the general efforts to ensure that this ambitious programme is fully implemented. As part of its new strategy to strengthen the capacities of parliamentarians for greater effectiveness, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is currently conducting awareness-raising campaigns for parliamentarians.

I hope that the National Assembly of Benin will think about contributing to the implementation of this programme at the national level. The Scaling Up Nutrition movement, which Benin joined in September 2011, could serve as a springboard for your involvement in the implementation of this new programme.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

For several years, the whole world has been seriously affected by rampant terrorism and its deadly activities that strike fear into the heart of our populations. Boko Haram, Ansar Dine and Al Shabab, African branches of these criminal groups, are spreading their deadly net across West and East Africa. Although the threat is serious, the situation remains manageable. We must not give into fear because the enemy itself is fearful and is operating clandestinely. You should take advantage of this weakness and arm yourselves with the political courage to address this scourge that is making the lives of our populations unbearable with calm, seriousness and perseverance.

The fight against an invisible enemy calls for reform in the areas of security and defence with a view to ensuring a proportional reaction to this insidious threat and restoring a lasting peace within our communities.

Globalization is generating increasingly negative sentiments through movements encouraging a retreat behind borders, which are manifesting themselves in protectionist measures that are detrimental to world trade. Given the valuable contribution of world trade to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is your responsibility to use your proximity to the people to dispel misconceptions about globalization that are generated by a rose-tinted view of a closed way of life.

Mr. President,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have just highlighted some of the many expectations of populations.

The proposals for action are certainly parliamentary, but I am convinced that you will also enjoy collaboration with other partners, notably the executive, the judiciary, civil society and international organizations. The challenges are clearly huge and by their nature cross-cutting and indivisible, and it has been shown that a global approach based on the coordination and harmonization of efforts is what is required to ensure quantitative and qualitative progress. In short, these challenges mean that the National Assembly has to prove itself as a democratic parliament and be representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and efficient.

At the regional level, cooperation between parliaments should be promoted given its many benefits, including the sharing of experience and good practice and the creation of an environment, which is conducive to the free movement of goods, prevents malicious acts from occurring and makes it possible to thwart the plans of ill-intentioned people.

I would like to assure you that the IPU is here to help you implement your initiatives and future actions to meet the needs of your populations. The House of Parliaments in Geneva, your house, remains open. We will be pleased to welcome you whenever you wish to come. In the meantime, I wish your parliamentary session every success.

Thank you for your attention.