



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland  
www.ipu.org

# Address by the IPU Secretary General on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of parliamentary life in Egypt

Sharm El-Sheikh  
9 October 2016

H.E. Mr. Abdel Fatah Al-Sissi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt,  
Hon. Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament,  
Distinguished Presidents of the African and Arab Parliaments,  
Members of parliament  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be present here to celebrate with you the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of parliamentary life in Egypt. I bring you the felicitations of the global parliamentary community.

The IPU itself has been with you for a good part of your parliamentary journey, having itself been founded in 1889.

Indeed, Egypt has been a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union for 92 of its 150 years of parliamentary life. In April 1924, Egypt became the first Arab Member of the IPU.

Egypt's membership of the IPU has been steady and steadfast. In fact, it has been more like a partnership. Since it joined our Organization, Egypt has been a shining example, paving the way for all newly independent Arab and African countries to join too.

In 1947, after the end of World War II, the IPU convened its 36<sup>th</sup> Conference in Cairo. Its 98<sup>th</sup> Conference also took place in Cairo in 1997. Both were very important, especially the one held in 1997, at which the IPU's flagship reference, the Universal Declaration on Democracy, was adopted. That Declaration, the first international instrument to codify the ingredients of democracy, is as valid today as it was back then, for it enshrines universal and lasting values and principles. Almost twenty years later, we are all gathered today again in Egypt, this time in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Egypt held the IPU presidency from 1994 to 1997. It was a presidency marked by a number of achievements, not only the adoption of the Declaration I have just mentioned but also the conclusion of the first ever co-operation agreement between the IPU and the United Nations - a real milestone. Last July, I was pleased to sign, with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon a new cooperation agreement. The new pact places the relationship on an even stronger footing.

In the country's recent past, following the revolution in January 2011, the IPU has supported Egypt along its somewhat painful and turbulent journey. The IPU was the first organization to approach the parliamentary administration and urge the authorities

to preserve Egypt's priceless cultural heritage. The IPU began a programme of technical assistance to the Egyptian Secretariat in preparation for the first post-revolution parliament. As part of that process, the IPU encouraged the new Egyptian Parliament to represent all sectors of its population.

In June 2013, the IPU was the first international organization to celebrate with the Egyptian people their quest for democracy. The IPU signed with the Egyptian authorities a large-scale technical cooperation programme in view of Egypt's importance on the regional and international arenas. As part of this programme, the IPU is working with the Secretariat of the Egyptian Parliament, which has a significant pool of knowledge.

As the Parliament celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is time for introspection, for some soul-searching, based on an assessment of its achievements and the challenges ahead. As it does this, I am sure it will want to reflect on what makes for a strong, more democratic parliament: one that is representative, transparent, accountable, accessible and effective. In sum, one that is better able to articulate the wishes of the people and deliver prosperity within the framework of the mandate prescribed in the Constitution. Taking this effort forward, the Parliament can count on the IPU's unflinching support.

As I admire your beautiful city of Sharm El-Sheikh, I see a symbol of peace and history. Egypt took a courageous step many years ago to work for peace with its neighbours. The entire world is longing for this region to finally achieve peace. But peace can only come through bold political decisions that put people before power and personal gain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Terrorism is omnipresent and your region has not been spared. Terrorism is a direct threat not only to life and limb but also to democracy, peace and dialogue – values which the IPU embodies and promotes. The IPU is set to tackle this challenge from the parliamentary perspective with the UN and other partners through its first Parliamentary Counter-Terrorism Strategy. I implore the Egyptian Parliament and all IPU Member Parliaments, to take the necessary legislative and policy measures to help stem the scourge of terrorism while respecting fundamental freedoms.

The IPU will be adopting a revised Strategy in a few weeks' time at its Assembly in Geneva. That document will serve as a roadmap for the IPU's work for the years to come. The Strategy is underpinned by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, with the overarching notion that democracy should deliver better development outcomes for the people. As I often say, democracy is not an end in itself; it is a means, a vehicle to achieve an end. The 2030 Development Agenda therefore provides a golden opportunity for democracy and parliament to prove their continuing relevance. The IPU is working with parliaments worldwide to achieve that ambition. I am sure we can count on the support of your Parliament.

So distinguished parliamentarians,

As you celebrate and reflect on Egypt's 150 years of parliamentary life, I urge you to use this opportunity to take stock of what benefits and fruits the parliamentary system has brought to your country and your people.

I leave you with these thoughts.

Thank you and happy festivities!