



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Address

**by Mr. Saber H. Chowdhury,
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),
on the occasion of his official visit to Belgrade, Serbia**

5 December 2016

Madam Speaker,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour for me to address you in this magnificent chamber today. I bring to you warm greetings from the IPU member Parliaments on this special occasion, which marks the 125th anniversary of Serbia's membership of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Congratulations! This is a real milestone in your country's rich history.

For those of you who might not be familiar with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), allow me to give you a brief overview of our unique Organization. The IPU was founded in 1889 by two visionaries – a Frenchman known as Frédéric Passy and an Englishman called William Randall Cremer, both recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901 and respectively 1903. These two individuals were convinced of the value of political dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. You will agree that their vision is as valid today as it was back then. Your country, Serbia, was one of the first Members of the IPU, having joined soon after the Organization's inception, in 1891.

The IPU works for peace, reconciliation, human rights and equality in all its aspects, as well as for effective and inclusive parliaments that reflect and represent society in all its diversity. The IPU is a pioneer in the areas of gender equality and youth representation in politics. It also has a unique mechanism for addressing alleged violations of the human rights of parliamentarians. These values and aspirations are embodied in the IPU's newly adopted Strategy, which will guide our work in the years to come.

On behalf of the IPU, I would like to pay tribute to the longstanding and loyal membership of the Serbian Parliament and its valuable contribution to the work of the IPU over the years. As some of you may be aware, some of Serbia's most prominent politicians have been involved in the work of the IPU over the decades. In 1963, the Serbian Parliament hosted the 52nd IPU Statutory Conference, which tackled critically important issues that are hugely relevant today: Equality between States as an essential basis of international cooperation, Increasing the effectiveness of the United Nations with a view to maintaining international peace and security, and the Creation of denuclearized and limited armaments zones as a first step towards general and complete disarmament

On this last point of nuclear disarmament, let me just recall that at the IPU we have been giving voice to the legitimate concerns of the people's representatives to protect our planet and citizens from the unspeakable destruction that can be brought about – intentionally or simply accidentally – by nuclear weapons. We have adopted strong resolutions calling for a nuclear weapons-free world, we have produced tools that can help parliamentarians advance this agenda, and we are currently actively engaged in the UN process aiming to commence negotiations on a first comprehensive treaty banning nuclear weapons once and for all.

Fellow parliamentarians,

We live in an ever smaller and more interdependent world. Global is local, and vice versa. The decisions and commitments undertaken by governments at the international level – be they in connection to trade, climate change, disaster risk reduction or migration – have a very direct impact on citizens and communities. Parliaments can no longer just rubber-stamp the various treaties and conventions entered into by their respective governments. They need to be part of the global conversation leading up to the adoption of the respective agreements, and they need to be active partners in translating these international commitments into national realities – adopting or amending legislation, allocating related funds and resources, exercising the parliamentary oversight role and making sure that our agreements are acted upon.

For over two decades now, the IPU has been developing a strategic partnership with the United Nations, convening legislators around the main global issues, bringing their voices and perspectives to the deliberations and negotiations at the UN, working with parliaments to enhance implementation of commitments and basically accompanying the main global processes with a parliamentary component.

Last year in 2015, the international community adopted three major UN agreements that seek to eradicate poverty and bring social, economic and environmental development on a sustainable path. These are Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Given how pivotal the SDGs were going to be, very early on the IPU began to organize a parliamentary input to the UN so that the goals would include the views of parliamentarians. The perspectives of parliaments and MPs from across the globe have indeed enriched the formulation and articulation of the SDGs and the IPU is proud to have contributed to this process.

In collaboration with other partners, we helped secure the governance goal (Goal 16), which among other things calls for more accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. We also gave a boost to goal 5 on gender equality, and goal 10 on inequalities within and between countries. The critical role and responsibility of parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs were also recognized in the Political Declaration accompanying the Goals.

So what is expected of parliaments in terms of carrying forward the SDGs? The first order of business is making sure that there is political will to implement the SDGs. The next step is making sure that each parliament is “fit for purpose”. The broad outline of this can be put in four points: one, “domesticate” the global goals so that you clearly identify which within each goal speaks to your countries’ concerns; two, make sure that there is a national plan in place to support country-specific goals and targets; three, find effective ways to hold governments to account for the implementation of national plans; and last but not least, make sure your constituents are familiar with the national plans for the goals and are consulted regularly with regard to their implementation.

To be able to do all this, each parliament will need to evaluate its own institutional processes. How will you be able to institutionalize the goals so as to capture the synergies and build coherence at the policy level?

In order to assist parliaments in this important effort, the IPU has developed a Self-Assessment Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to assist parliaments and parliamentarians to identify whether they are equipped in terms of institutional processes and capacities to do their part in implementing the SDGs, and to identify what can be done in addition to enable parliamentarians to most effectively engage in

and support SDG implementation. I encourage you to use the toolkit and to continue to share your experiences with other parliaments through the IPU.

Fellow parliamentarians,

Looking more broadly at the complex challenges facing our world today, we cannot underestimate the value of parliamentary diplomacy. Time and time again, we have seen how parliamentary cooperation can serve as a laboratory for innovative ideas and solutions. It was parliamentarians from the East and the West, meeting at the IPU in the 1960s at the height of the Cold War, who initiated the process on security and cooperation in Europe. It was MPs and political representatives from both the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus that helped open a political dialogue on the island. And it was parliamentarians who first drew international attention to the widespread harm caused by anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, passing national legislation categorically prohibiting these weapons of terror, and ultimately paving the way for the 1997 global Mine Ban Treaty and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

We are first and foremost the representatives of the people, and we must never tire in listening to their grievances and working to meet their expectations. We must lead by example and strive to meet our electoral commitments. We cannot be immune to the growing disenchantment of young people with politics; we must persevere in rejuvenating democracy and giving voice to youth.

So fellow parliamentarians, as we continue to work for the good of our people, let us put some humanity back into politics and practise what we preach: tolerance, inclusiveness and solidarity. Let us continue to strive for a better life for all.

To the Parliament of Serbia, I wish you memorable celebrations. We at the IPU are pleased to be part of these celebrations, and we very much look forward to our close cooperation in the years ahead.

To the people of Serbia, I wish to salute your many achievements over the past years, as you have overcome the hardship and many challenges that came about with Europe's reconfiguration at the end of the Cold War. Serbia is now on a firm path towards formally rejoining the free, prosperous and democratic community of a united Europe, and we wish you full success in this historical enterprise.

Thank you.