



**Opening Remarks for Mr. Michael Møller
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva**

“Driving Democratic Change – IPU at 125 and Beyond”

**Palais des Nations, Room XX
Monday, 30 June 2014 from 15:00 to 18:00**

**President Radi
Secretary General Johnsson
Secretary General-elect Chungong
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

A warm welcome to you all, to the Palais des Nations and to this magnificent Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room. I cannot think of a more appropriate venue to mark the 125th anniversary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union than this room, which embodies our collective commitment to the promotion of the fundamental rights of every single individual on this planet and to dialogue to resolve common challenges. Birthdays are best shared with family, and the IPU is a key member of our International Geneva family, so we appreciate that we can all come together here in Geneva to celebrate you. A special welcome to the speakers and guests who have come from afar to be with us. We are glad to have you be part of our family here.

For the past 125 years, the IPU has worked tirelessly to promote the role of parliaments as platforms of dialogue to resolve differences with the commitment to human rights at the core, and I appreciate this opportunity to congratulate you on your contributions to more peaceful and democratic societies in all corners of the world.

Today represents a milestone for the IPU. Not only because of the 125th anniversary but also because it marks the conclusion of the leadership of my friend and colleague Secretary General Anders Johnsson. Driven by a deep conviction in the value of democracy and the importance of parliaments, as a fearless defender of fundamental rights, never afraid to speak truth to power, as an eloquent advocate for the empowerment of all, not least women and youth, as a consummate diplomat working for compromise on contentious issues, he epitomizes the values of our organizations. He has inspired parliamentarians across the world to a global engagement and he has been architect behind the consolidation of the strategic partnership with the United Nations. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to him and to thank him, publicly, for his achievements, for his friendship with the United Nations and for our personal friendship. Thank you, Anders.

I appreciate also welcoming incoming Secretary General Martin Chungong and pledge our support. We have already been working closely together during your tenure as Deputy Secretary General, and we appreciate your dedication to human rights and to inclusive democracy. Advancing democratic values is truly a global task and we look forward to taking forward our partnership with you.

The United Nations and the IPU are united in our commitment to empowerment. Empowerment of individuals and communities to shape the future they want. A future where all can fulfil their potential in peace, freedom and dignity and where societies can thrive.

How do we build on the achievements of the past 125 years to drive democratic change at a time of profound transformation at the global level, at a time when many have lost confidence in institutions and their ability to deliver, at a time of rapid progress but when peace and development elude so many, and at a time when transitions in some parts of the world have disappointed expectations for a better future?

I believe that this is a reality where the partnership between the United Nations and parliamentarians generally, and

between our Organization and the IPU in particular, will become even more important. As our societies change, through a combination of political developments and technological progress, it is more essential than ever that our global aspirations are fully supported at all levels.

Every day, the collective efforts of the United Nation and all of our partners impact the lives of all individuals on this planet. Parliaments and parliamentarians are multipliers of global activities and messages. They link us with the people that we serve. And while we have been very successful in injecting the parliamentary dimension into the United Nations by integrating the voices of parliamentarians in global discussions, I believe that we still need to get better at injecting the United Nations into the deliberations in parliaments across the world. At a time when the distinctions across local, national, regional and global levels are becoming increasingly blurred, we need to make sure that global concerns are connected effectively to the local level. Parliaments are critical in this task.

Empowered and informed constituents are the bedrock of sound democracies. Education and access to information are essential to democratic processes, and there is no doubt that the media play indispensable key role in both areas.

With the advent of social media and increasing access to the Internet, our media landscape is also undergoing rapid change. The impact on our democracies has yet to be fully understood, and I welcome that this dimension will be addressed today. But as we hail the possible empowerment of individuals through social media platforms and access to an abundance of online data, we must not lose sight of the fact that almost two-thirds of the world's population does not have access to the Internet and rely on traditional media – if they have access to any, that is. Both sides of the coin need to be considered and addressed.

Just this weekend, on 28 June, we marked another milestone – the 100th anniversary of the shots in Sarajevo that triggered the calamity of the First World War. As we meet here at the Palais des Nations – the building that was constructed to house the League of Nations as the embodiment of the shared commitment to peace four years after those fateful shots – we are reminded of how fragile peace can be and the need to nurture it over time, guarding against the denial of rights and weakening of democracy.

Therefore, as we look ahead, we need strengthen our cooperation to promote peace, rights and well-being for all.

With the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons since the end of the Second World War, growing military expenditure and a decline in many of the indicators for peace, our world faces a worrying peace deficit – a deficit that seems to be growing. All too often, fellow human beings are denied their fundamental rights and not allowed to contribute in a meaningful way to shape their societies. Bearing in mind the lessons of history, we must work harder to close the gap between vision and reality when it comes to peace, justice and dignity for all.

As we move towards a post-2015 development framework, a central challenge will be how to translate this into a local context with accountability for delivery. Linked with the post-2015 development agenda is the ongoing process through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change towards a global climate agreement by 2015. We look to parliaments to step up the engagement to turn this broader sustainable development agenda into a reality for all citizens – and for that to happen we must ensure that it becomes embedded in the agendas of national parliaments.

People across the world look to their parliaments and to the United Nations to build peace, advance development, uphold the rule of law and confront abuse wherever it takes place.

In short, they look for democracy to deliver at all levels.

Let us be worthy of their trust.

Thank you very much.