



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Opening address by the IPU President Hon. Abdelwahad Radi

Interactive session on

Driving democratic change – IPU at 125 and beyond

30 June, 3-6 p.m., UNOG, Room XX

Mr. Michael Møller, Ag. Director-General of UNOG
Excellencies,
Members of the IPU Executive Committee,
Distinguished panellists,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to this joint interactive session at the United Nations Office at Geneva. This is but one of the many events we have planned to mark this watershed moment in our Organization's life – its 125th anniversary. I am particularly pleased to see that so many of you have travelled from far and wide to be with us for the festivities. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to Mr. Michael Møller, without whom this event would not have been possible.

For those of you who are not familiar with us, allow me to reveal a small part of our history. The Inter-Parliamentary Union or the IPU as it is commonly known, owes its existence to two visionaries: an Englishman called William Randal Cremer, and a Frenchman, Frédéric Passy. Those two men had a vision of a world where peace and stability reigned and where differences could be resolved through dialogue and negotiation rather than conflict. That vision led to the creation of the IPU in 1889 in Paris. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Over a century later, their vision still holds as true as ever. For is this not what all peoples and nations aspire to in their heart of hearts? That aspiration is translated nowadays into negotiation, multilateral cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy. Yet as conflicts rage on in different parts of the world, it is clear that this vision is not shared by all. Indeed, the ravages of wars past do not always act as a deterrent. History, it seems, keeps repeating itself, and one wonders if there is no end to human folly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the oldest multilateral organization in the world, the IPU has much to be proud of since its inception 125 ago. Its membership has grown from a handful of European parliamentarians to 164 national parliaments spanning the entire globe. Multilateralism has become an entrenched concept in global politics today, thanks in no small measure to the work of the IPU.

Back in those early years, the Founding Fathers of the IPU were convinced that conflicts could only be dealt with through dialogue and arbitration. It was their deliberations that led to the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 1899. Over the decades, the IPU has provided a platform for political interaction and a laboratory for new and innovative ideas. Well before governments

were ready to formally act, it was at the IPU that parliamentarians examined the prospects of a conference on security and cooperation in Europe, the abolition of landmines and cluster munitions, or the political dialogue among the leaders of the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus.

The organization's core work can be summed up by the title of its Strategy for 2012-2017: **Better parliaments, stronger democracies**. While democracy is by no means a perfect system of governance, it is the best one the world has devised to date. It can continue to be improved in so many ways – by building the capacity of the people's representatives, by protecting human rights and by promoting gender equality, among others.

Moreover, the global issues of our time, as well as the effective implementation of our international commitments, require the informed and active engagement of parliaments and parliamentarians worldwide. It is this shared understanding that lies at the foundation of the growing partnership between the IPU and the United Nations.

The theme of today's session, **Driving democratic change – IPU at 125 and beyond**, aims to look back at some of our organization's notable achievements over the years and more importantly, to look ahead to our roadmap for the future.

We are fortunate to be graced with the presence of personalities from across the world, who will share their own experiences of democracy and democratic change in a country-specific context. We will also hear personal testimonials from members of parliament who have directly benefited from the IPU's work on human rights. The panellists will zero in on the challenges facing democracy today, including gender inequality. The last segment will look at the role of the media in covering political affairs.

I now invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to make history with us as we celebrate the life and achievements of our beloved organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Thank you.