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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY PANEL EVENT ON PARLIAMENTS AND CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY HOUSE OF PARLIAMENTS, 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION

Late last year the United Nations General Assembly declared 15 September as the International Day of Democracy. This decision carries special significance for the IPU as the international organization that brings together a cornerstone of democracy – namely parliaments. The IPU promotes democracy on the basis of the Universal Declaration on Democracy which its members had adopted in September ten years earlier.

Both the UNGA decision and the IPU Declaration recognise that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their life.

Despite the advances made by democracy across the world, it faces considerable difficulties and even disillusionment in both established and emerging democracies. Failure to identify and address these challenges may undermine the foundations of democracy and therefore requires action by Parliaments.

Democracy requires strong parliaments that are based on a set of core values - to be representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective both nationally and in international affairs. Parliaments – like democracy – are always perfectible, and the extent to which they put these values into practice is perhaps the best indicator of the future health of democracy.

The IPU urges parliaments to celebrate the International Day of Democracy through some form of special activity. The IPU will also hold a panel debate at its headquarters in Geneva.

OBJECTIVES

The panel aims at stimulating debate on democracy, the challenges it faces and how to overcome them. It seeks to shed light on a number of issues, including:

- What are the main challenges that democracy faces today and how should they be addressed? How is democracy affected by globalization and today's consumer society, the new information and communication technologies and the virtual world in which we increasingly live, the emergence of new forms of social organizations such as civil society organizations, to mention but a few examples?

- How do parliaments and other political actors and processes perform in this environment? Are they adapting to today's world? What can and should they do to meet the challenges facing democracy?

TARGET AUDIENCE

The event will bring together a group of democracy experts, politicians and practitioners to interact with diplomats, representatives of civil society and the media as well as university students.

TIMING AND VENUE

The event will take place from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm on 15 September 2008 at the IPU headquarters, the House of Parliaments in Geneva. It will be followed by a reception. Webcast and broadcast.

PROGRAMME

- 09.30 – 09.45: Introductory session: welcome messages from:
- IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson
 - Director General of UN Office in Geneva, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze
- 09.45 – 10.00 Brief introduction of the panel and panellists by Moderator
10.00 – 12.15 Presentations by panellists followed by debates with audience.
- 12.15.- 12.25 Summing up by Moderator
- 12.25 – 12.30 Closing remarks by IPU Secretary General, Mr Anders B. Johnsson
- 12.30 - 13.30 Light Lunch and possibility for media to interview panellists