



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

International Day of Democracy

15 September 2008

Statement by Anders B. Johnsson

Secretary General

Geneva, 15 September 2008

Democracy is worth fighting for

Over the last twenty years we have witnessed an unprecedented move towards democracy in every corner of the world. One country after another has abandoned authoritarian rule in favor of multi-party democracies with an elected parliament at its centre. Does that mean that we live in a more democratic world today?

Not necessarily. In our increasingly fragmented yet interdependent world many processes and decisions directly affecting peoples' lives escape normal democratic checks and balances. Globalization and international cooperation involves decision-making that lacks democratic control. And even at the level of the sovereign nation State where not so long ago all important decisions were taken, the central institution of democracy - parliament - faces a crisis of legitimacy in many countries. Parliament is at pains to reflect all components of society, does not control the agenda and has scarce resources at its disposal. Far too often it must also contend with a lack of commitment by the country's leaders to the sharing of political power that is so essential to democratic parliamentary processes.

That said, democracy has achieved a level of acceptance that it has maybe never had before. It is a universally recognized ideal as well as a system of government. As an ideal, democracy aims essentially to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual. As a system of government, democracy is the best way of achieving these objectives. It is also the only system of government that has the capacity for self-correction.

Democracy is therefore worth fighting for. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has been engaged in that struggle since its inception and can be proud of its many achievements, some of which are highlighted in this publication.

The IPU embraces the International Day of Democracy. It invites all parliaments to join in celebrating democracy's achievements. Let us also pause to reflect on how we can surmount the challenges facing democracy today and bring about effective rule by the people, for the benefit of each and every one of us. Demos kratos!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders B. Johnsson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anders B. Johnsson
IPU Secretary General