



# UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE

5, CHEMIN DU POMMIER

CASE POSTALE 330

1218 LE GRAND SACONNEX / GENÈVE (SUISSE)

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## **Regional seminar on “The evolving relationship between citizens and parliaments in the Arab world”**

Rabat (Morocco), 5-6 June 2013

### **Opening address by**

***Mr. Abdelwahad Radi***

***President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union***

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for this seminar that will reflect on the evolving relationship between citizens and parliaments in the Arab world. I would like to thank the Moroccan Parliament for having taken this initiative in partnership with UNDP and the IPU. I also wish to salute Ms. Rebeca Grynspan of UNDP, who participated in the launch of the *Global Parliamentary Report* in Uganda in April 2012, and who today is pursuing that commitment alongside parliaments.

Distinguished delegates,

The changes under way in the Arab world mirror people's aspirations for greater political, economic and social freedom. The political system in all the countries in the region is evolving to varying degrees and in keeping with the specificities of each country. No one can predict the outcome. The only certainty is that things will no longer be as they were before.

It is precisely during deep crises that the existence of a strong parliament - which stands as a symbol of democracy throughout the world - is crucial. The democratic values embodied by the institution of parliament still resonate loudly with our peers.

All processes of political transformation following a major upheaval have a common denominator – finding a way of resolving national problems through a fair system of political representation; in other words through the election of a parliament.

Parliaments are, after all, a strong and irreplaceable link between citizens and governments, and the functions with which they are invested cannot be carried out by any other body. That is why 190 out of 193 countries have a parliamentary assembly in one form or another.

At the same time, parliaments are having to deal with ever higher expectations of citizens, and their action is being held up to greater scrutiny than ever before.



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Our responsibility is to make sure that parliament is the forum for expressing and managing the different interests within society. We know that better than anyone. The daily life of a parliament is made up of diverse opinions and dialogue in order to reach compromise or agreement - because in politics no single person holds the truth - and our ability to listen and understand is sometimes more important than our ability to speak. This in fact highlights a fundamental principle of democracy – respect for one another.

This is why I strongly recommend that you read the *Global Parliamentary Report*, published jointly by the IPU and UNDP. The *Report* provides a sharp analysis of the institutional challenges facing parliaments in rapidly changing societies on the one hand, and the individual challenges that each member of parliament has to face each day on the other.

Throughout the world parliamentarians are telling us that they are devoting more and more time to constituency work because their voters consider that a parliamentarian's primary task is to meet individual or local expectations. And this sometimes at the risk of neglecting their roles of law-making and overseeing executive action.

The real challenge is to modernize parliament as an institution so that it corresponds to citizens' expectations through:

- Modernizing the composition of parliament by seeing to it that the proportion of women parliamentarians in particular corresponds to women's presence in society;
- Modernizing working methods to allow parliamentarians to convey in the most effective way on-the-ground realities and bringing a legislative response to them; and
- Lastly, modernizing parliament's ability to listen. The relationship between constituents and elected parliamentarians is not one-way; if this fact were to be ignored or neglected, the political and human cost could be considerable.

For parliaments to enhance their image they must ensure that the public can make its voice heard in the work of the legislature and they must scrupulously respect the highest standards of probity and transparency.

The onus is on you to take up these challenges. It is up to you to mould and shape modern institutions that can embody 21<sup>st</sup>-century democracy. Your discussions this week should allow you to draw up the basic blueprints and the IPU will be at your side supporting you in this endeavour to build meaningful parliaments.