

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT
“PARLIAMENTS IN TIME OF CRISIS: SECURING GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC
ACCOUNTABILITY”
Geneva, 19 July 2010**

President Theo-Ben Gurirab of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,
Distinguished Speakers of Parliament,
Secretary-General Anders Johnsson of I.P.U.,
Honourable Parliamentarians,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to have this privilege to address the distinguished speakers of world's parliament.

Looking out, I see ideals ... I see experience.

You come from many different backgrounds ... but you are united in purpose.

Wherever I travel, I try to speak to national assemblies and parliaments. You may have varying powers and ambitions ... but you are the true backbone of democracy.

You make the laws.

By your very diversity, you are the voice of the people.

You link the local with the national ... and the national with the global.

Some of you may know the saying: All politics is local.

At the United Nations, especially, we know that to be true.

After all, the opening words of the UN Charter are: “We, the peoples.”

Like you, the United Nations bears a great responsibility. That is to realize the dreams and aspirations of those we represent.

Peace and security ... climate change ... human rights ... the well-being of families and societies ... these great global issues are also great local issues.

And you, parliamentarians, see that every day.

That is why your voices are so important to the effective governance of our complex world.

And that is why we are all here today.

Like never before, the world needs your leadership. The world needs strong, effective, outspoken parliaments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since you last met, five years ago, the world has been shaken by crises.

You know them as well as I do.

The financial crisis... the food crisis ... economic recession ... all of these compounded by the effects of climate change.

We are struggling to end conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and elsewhere.

Natural disasters, most recently in Haiti, have tested our collective will.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology... the menace of terrorism... and the growth of transnational organized crime are growing threats to international peace and security.

They call for collective action.

More than ever before, they require us to work with a broad range of partners.

To be effective, our responses must be both global and local.

They must be rooted in our pact with the world's people.

This is the true meaning ... this is the essence ... of “democratic accountability” – the theme of your Conference.

Looking ahead, we need your leadership in four areas.

First, it is you who must act on the great challenges of our times. It is you who must ratify treaties on climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, economic development ... and much else.

More, it is you who must fund these commitments. It is you who must remind governments of their international obligations.

With your strong leadership, our future will be that much brighter.

Second, parliaments can and should be a force for stability.

Democracies rarely wage war against each other.

Civil wars break out less frequently in well-established democracies.

Parliaments help to resolve ethnic, religious and economic tensions. They reinforce justice and the rule of law. They can help advance the interests of women and minority groups.

Third, parliaments are essential in advancing development and creating prosperity.

This is particularly important as we approach the 2015 target date for the Millennium Development Goals.

We have made progress, but we must step up the pace.

The MDGs are, simply put, an expression of our collective commitment to reduce poverty, hunger and ill-health.

Too many of our people, in too many parts of the world, live in conditions that are simply intolerable.

As parliamentarians, you ... more than anyone ... know we must help them.

Here, too, democracy is a force for change.

As the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen pointed out, no famine has ever taken place in a flourishing democracy. Democratic governments competing for votes must feed their people.

More, development is more likely to succeed when people can influence their own governance.

So we look to parliaments to write the laws and invest in the programmes that will achieve the MDGs.

You are on the front lines, fighting for your people ... for basic services like safe water and sanitation ... primary education ... health care.

It is up to you to mobilize and prepare your governments for our final push towards the Goals. That starts with the MDG summit in New York, two months from now.

National ownership is key. We must come up with solid, workable action plans ... plans that deliver ... real results for real people.

Some say the goals are too ambitious ... that time is too short.

My view is the opposite. Experience has shown how much is possible with the right policies and adequate resources.

We know what works and what doesn't.

Parliaments must help us move from vision to action.

Let me close on a fourth area where we need your leadership: nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Recently, we have seen signs of progress

In May, the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty concluded successfully.

The historic Security Council summit on nuclear non-proliferation last year ... the conclusion of a new START agreement ... the Washington summit on nuclear safety.

With these building blocks, we are inching closer to a world free of nuclear weapons. But much more needs to be done. I sincerely hope that the 2nd Nuclear Security Summit to be held in the Republic of Korea in 2012 will be a great success in realizing our goal, a world free of nuclear weapons.

We urgently need progress towards the entry into force of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

We also need to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament. I will convene a high-level meeting in New York in September for that purpose.

And in August, on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the world's first nuclear attack, I will visit the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For decades, parliamentarians and civil society organizations have worked to counter the nuclear threat. I thank you in particular for adopting a resolution last year endorsing my own five-point nuclear disarmament proposal.

Please keep up the pressure for change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Democracy has proven its power across our shared agenda.

That is why I am troubled by recent reversals. There have been unconstitutional changes of government, in Africa and elsewhere.

There have been coups and illegal seizures of power.

This puts hard-won development gains at risk.

It breeds instability. It runs counter to our firmly held principles.

Constitutional rule is not always shattered in a single blow. It can suffer death by a thousand cuts, as when governments manipulate constitutional, political and electoral processes to extend their term in office.

International criminal networks pose yet another threat to the rule of law. They spread corruption, compromise elections and damage the legitimate economy.

Such threats remind us that there is nothing inevitable about democratic development. It comes through hard work ... vision ... leadership ... and sustained effort.

People rightly look to the United Nations to help.

They look to us to help build democracy ... to recover from war ... to help uphold the rule of law ... and to shine a spotlight on shortcomings and outright abuses.

But above all, they look to you, their chosen parliamentarians.

You are part of a universal democratic ideal.

You are proof that democracy is not a model imposed by one part of the world on another ... you are evidence that democracy is a yearning shared and voiced by people the world over.

Distinguished speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I myself grew up in a country – Korea – devastated by war. It lacked many of the basic elements of a functioning democracy.

Today it has one of the most passionate and lively parliamentary cultures in the world. Some might even say – too lively.

In between, there were dark periods of military rule.

There were times when the National Assembly's voice was crushed.

But party leaders and political activists – parliamentarians like you – led and won the day.

Hand in hand with democracy, my country's economy has grown and its people have prospered.

I have witnessed, firsthand, the birth pains of democracy ... the slow and halting path it may take ... and the stability and prosperity that are its rewards.

I know how important your work is; what a difference it makes.

That is why I have such great respect for you and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and why I am so happy to be with you today.

The I.P.U. is bringing the voice of the world's people to the work of the United Nations.

It is helping to integrate global issues into the work of national assemblies all over the world.

At this time of crisis and challenge, let us deepen our strategic partnership.

Let us continue to work together.

And in closing, let me say that I look forward to meeting you once again, when I visit you in your home parliaments on my future travels.

Until then, I extend to all of you my best wishes for continued success and prosperity. I count on your leadership and commitment in working together with the United Nations to make a better world for all.

Thank you.