

Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Statement by H.E. Mr. Olemic Thommessen
Speaker of Parliament, Norway

Dear Speakers, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to stand here before this distinguished audience, in this historic room. To have the opportunity to meet my fellow colleagues, Speakers of Parliament across the globe, is not only a great privilege; it is also an invaluable tool in our work towards the common goals of a peaceful and democratic world.

The agreement on the new UN sustainability goals is another milestone in international cooperation. As Speakers of Parliament, we all carry a responsibility to reach these goals.

The Norwegian Parliament has already requested that the Government put forward a white paper in 2016 on how to make the UN sustainability goals operational.

Unfortunately, the Nordic governments' efforts to implement a binding formulation on human rights and good governance in the negotiations were not successful.

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We welcome that the proposals include such priority areas as energy, climate change, food security, water and sanitation, and, not least, women's equality, reproductive health and rights.

Still, I would like to remind you all that to successfully improve all these areas, good governance is the very best tool at hand. If it was up to me, I would have liked to include the wording *good governance* to the sustainability goals, for instance to goal number 16.

Democracy grew steadily year after year from the 1970s until the first half of the last decade. Regrettably, however, in recent years we have witnessed stagnation and even setbacks in this development.

We see that for a number of complex reasons many aspiring democratic regimes are in danger of foundering or have already done so. All too often, too much emphasis has been attached to elections rather than to build lasting democratic institutions.

Furthermore, some democratically elected leaders have undermined democracy from within by using their newly won trust to give themselves almost unlimited powers.

Democracy must never be a game of winner-takes-it-all.

We must do our utmost to support continuing democratic development in infant and struggling democracies. Let me therefore take this moment to underline the crucial role parliaments play in safeguarding democracy. Our parliaments must be at the forefront of democratic development. In a modern society, the ultimate responsibility to protect democracy rests with the parliament.

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All parliaments must lead the way in creating open and transparent societies that are founded on the rule of law. They must make sure that appropriate structures are in place to prevent the abuse of power and its ensuing corruption. They must ensure that there is a clear division of power between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.

It is also of vital importance to create mechanisms that secure the integrity of parliamentarians and the parliaments they are part of. After all, Parliament is fundamentally about opposition and debate. If these systems are perceived as not working well, democratic rights and freedoms will come under threat. Safeguarding the rights of the opposition means safeguarding the principle of agreeing not to agree; of creating a platform for discussion within a peaceful framework.

These are the very conditions that create trust between the people and their elected governments. That ensure the broad participation in our societies that is so crucial for vibrant democracies.

Thank you.