

Speech by the President of the German Bundestag, Professor Norbert Lammert, during the General Debate of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament on the subject of “Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: building the world the people want” on 1 September 2015 in New York

Mister Chairman,

Honorable Presidents,

Fellow Parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the last 15 years, since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, the global community has achieved remarkable progress in several important fields. Unfortunately, this is not true as far as the development of democracies in this world is concerned. On the contrary, the last year, 2014, was the 9th year in a row with severe setbacks for civil and political rights in several countries. Professional studies indicate that, today, not even half of the world population lives in stable functioning democratic states.

We hopefully agree that democracy is not just a term. We hopefully agree that democracy is more than the sheer existence of a parliament, that it is more than having free and fair elections and the rule of majority. Democracy is the protection of minorities, is the oversight of government and administration, is freedom of speech, of press, of religion, is rule of law and independent courts. Only two dozen out of roundabout two-hundred states meet these claims comprehensively. And, on the other hand we have more than fifty states with authoritarian regimes. Nowadays we even witness the rise of a concept of so called illiberal democracy which is of course a contradiction in itself because we either talk about liberal conditions of life or we don't have a functioning democracy.

We are all parliamentarians, we have all our responsibilities as speakers or presidents at home, but we are hopefully aware that we work under significantly different working conditions: there

are countries with free elections and others without; there are countries with fair competitions between a plurality of parties and candidates and countries without. We have countries with open or restricted access to public offices and parliamentary mandate. We have countries with independent courts or without, with freedom of press or with censorship. There are many countries in which parliaments oversee the work of government and several others where government controls parliament.

Reinforcing the principles of democracy begins with naming the reality as it is and changing it wherever it is necessary. Twenty-five years after the tremendous transformation of middle and eastern European countries into parliamentary democracies there is now just one encouraging example of a successful democratic change: Tunisia. And this country should get not only our applause and congratulations but our strong support for its further development.

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is easy to adopt a new resolution, “placing democracy at the service of peace and development”. It needs much more ambition to implement “what the people wants”. I very much hope that we develop this ambition and the strength which is needed to implement what we describe. Thank you.