



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Opening statement by the Hon. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President
Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations.

United Nations
ECOSOC chamber
New York, 31 October 2005

Mr. President,
Speakers and members of Parliament,
Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to this year's parliamentary hearing at the United Nations.

Less than two weeks ago I was elected President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. During my campaign I pledged to strengthen cooperation between parliaments and the United Nations through the IPU. It is therefore highly appropriate that I start my mandate by coming to the United Nations.

Last month, Speakers of parliaments from all over the world met here at United Nations headquarters at their second world summit. At the end of our discussions we adopted a declaration that I encourage you to study. Copies are available in this room.

The document is short and to the point. It is built around a single focused message: parliaments have an essential role to play to bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

We express full support for the United Nations. We want to see a stronger United Nations. We call on States, including our own parliaments, to demonstrate leadership and political will to provide the United Nations with more efficient mechanisms, appropriate human and financial resources and real management reform.

We want to see the UN reform proposals debated and we want governments to act on them now. We want reform and we want it to be comprehensive. We want reform to respect the intrinsic link between democracy, security, development and human rights.

It is therefore fitting that we start today's hearing with a discussion on the outcome of this year's United Nations Summit. Reform of the United Nations figures prominently in the outcome document and we will have an opportunity to hear from those directly involved in leading the continuing negotiations on reform.

The declaration that we adopted also calls for the conclusion of a comprehensive treaty on terrorism with a clear definition of terrorism. We will learn later today of progress achieved in this area as we discuss the role parliament can and must play in the global fight against terrorism.

We will also discuss our common responsibility to protect. Over the last twelve months we have witnessed extraordinary calamities striking many countries. Tsunamis, hurricanes, flooding and earth quakes have caused the death of tens of thousands of people and have created unimaginable damage that it will take years and years to repair and which will cost many billions of dollars. Beyond natural disasters, we will also be talking about the need to protect those who are the victims of man-made disasters.

Our last session will be devoted to peace building. At their summit, the Heads of State and government agreed to create a Peace-Building Commission and we will learn more about that.

Let us not forget that members of parliament can be exceedingly helpful in building peace. We have many examples where parliamentary diplomacy has assisted erstwhile enemies in finding common ground. Parliaments also have a prominent role to play in reconciliation processes. And, of course, the very existence of a strong and effective parliament is itself an essential component of any solution to conflict and building of peace.

This is one particular area where the Inter-Parliamentary Union through its activities around the world has gained considerable experience and expertise. We therefore encourage the United Nations to resort more frequently to the political and technical expertise that the IPU together with our Member Parliaments can provide, particularly in areas relating to post-conflict institution building.

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,

Before concluding my statement I would like to revert very briefly to the declaration adopted by the Speakers of Parliament and the conclusions of the United Nations Summit. In one part of those conclusions, the Heads of State and government call for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the Inter-Parliamentary Union. They want this cooperation to encompass implementation of UN reform as well as all areas of the Millennium Declaration they adopted in 2000.

Over the last year many parliaments have discussed how best to organize cooperation with the United Nations. We have concluded that, while we perform our constitutional role at home to represent the will of the people, this includes a clear responsibility in relation to the multitude of international negotiations that take place in multilateral forums.

We want to make sure that we are well informed of these negotiations, that we have an opportunity to debate what is being negotiated, that we can question ministers and that we can influence the negotiating positions they are advancing on behalf of our people. And once negotiations have concluded, it is for us to ratify agreements and see to their implementation. That involves adopting or amending legislation, it involves voting budgets and, of course, it involves holding governments to account in implementation.

We also reaffirm that parliaments should increase their international work in partnership with the IPU. We are not in support of the creation of new parliamentary structures at the United Nations or elsewhere.

Instead, we want the IPU to mobilize expertise, which exists in parliamentary standing and select committees, and to work on issues on the international agenda. We want the IPU to facilitate the provision of more and better information to national parliaments on the activities of the United Nations. We want the IPU to stage more parliamentary hearings like this one and specialized meetings at the United Nations. And we want the IPU to cooperate more closely with official regional parliamentary assemblies and organizations.

This represents a huge agenda for parliaments and for the IPU. The Speakers came to New York with a commitment from their respective parliaments to put it into effect. I pledge to do everything I can during the coming three years as President of the IPU to strengthen our organization and to turn this agenda into reality.

Mr. President,

It is on this basis that I look forward to working with you and with Member States to construct a strategic partnership between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.