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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT THE ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY HEARING**

**JOINT UN-IPU EVENT**

**New York, 20 November 2007**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join all of you today. This is the first time the Annual Parliamentary Hearing has been jointly organized by the UN and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is also my first time addressing this Hearing as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Let me thank all of you for being here, and for giving me this opportunity to share some thoughts on advancing the rule of law in an international setting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The rule of law rests on the notion that everyone -- from the individual citizen right up to the State itself -- is accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated.

The United Nations has always strived towards this goal. From our Organization's earliest days, Member States have worked together to codify and develop an important body of international law. The judgments and opinions of international courts, especially the International Court of Justice, have aided and advanced this effort. As a result, today, the international community can justifiably point to a wide body of international rules and regulations that exemplify our collective commitment to, and belief in, the rule of law.

The normative foundation of our work in advancing the rule of law is the Charter of the United Nations, together with the four pillars of the modern international legal system: international human rights law; international humanitarian law; international criminal law; and international refugee law.

Upholding, and strengthening, this legal regime at the international level is crucial to the cause of peace. It can help prevent or resolve conflicts and check weapons proliferation. It can protect people from genocide and other crimes against humanity. And it can aid the fight against terrorists and support efforts to limit the spread of communicable diseases.

That is why the United Nations has prioritized promoting the rule of law at both the national and international levels. Over a dozen departments, agencies, funds and programmes are involved in this work.

Taken together with the work of non-UN actors, this makes for a crowded field. That means we must do better in strategic planning and coordination, and plan in partnership with recipient States, so as to prevent duplication and make optimal use of scarce financial resources. This was a call made loud and clear by Member States at the 2005 World Summit.

Earlier this year, I established the Rule of Law Coordination and Resource Group. Headed by the Deputy Secretary-General, this Unit brings together the heads of the eight leading UN Departments and entities engaged in the rule of law. Let me mention some of the main ones:

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights deals with transitional justice, national human rights institutions, and a range of justice sector institutions. The Office of Legal Affairs handles rule of law issues at the international level, such as the promotion and ratification of multilateral treaties. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime focuses on criminal justice issues. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations, through its new Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, works to build up the capacity of post-conflict States in security sector reform, police, justice, corrections and legal development, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The United Nations Development Programme conducts capacity-building in crisis and post-crisis settings, as well as long-term development settings, so as to ensure a continuum from relief to development.

Over these coming two days, you will have the opportunity to meet with my colleagues from all of these areas. They all look to you as essential partners in the UN's efforts in the rule of law. I hope that the discussions that began here will continue long after you have returned to your capitals.

More broadly, I hope that you will remain steadfast allies of the United Nations in all our work, from human rights to peace and security, from development to the environment and climate change.

Distinguished parliamentarians,

Let me say a few words on this latter challenge, climate change. Last week I visited South America and Antarctica. I saw up-close how some of the most precious treasures of our planet -- the Amazon rainforest, the Patagonian wilderness, and the ice sheets of the white continent - Antarctica - are being threatened by humankind's own activities.

Then, last weekend, in Valencia, Spain, I launched the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - a synthesis of the Panel's unequivocal findings so far. As the report makes clear, there are real and affordable ways to deal with climate change. Concerted and sustained action now can still avoid some of the most catastrophic scenarios. The resources, technology and financing needed to make a difference are all available. What we lack is the political will.

As parliamentarians, you can work to change this. You can rally support in national capitals across the world. And you can help make the fight against climate change a truly global effort. We must act now, for the price of inaction far exceeds the cost of action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to end by mentioning another stop on my recent travels. In Lebanon, I saw a Parliament in crisis, and parliamentarians living in a constant state of fear. To protect the parliamentarians from further assassinations, they are now virtually "under house arrest"; unable to move freely, spend time with their families, and serve their constituents.

The entire international community must speak out on their behalf. That crucially includes you, their fellow parliamentarians.

By speaking out and stepping forward, you can help create safe, law-abiding societies where all citizens lead dignified and productive lives.

In that spirit, I wish you a most productive discussion.

Thank you very much.