



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. Saber Chowdhury

Statement at the UN General Assembly debate on Interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU (agenda item 124)

New York, 25 July 2016

Dear Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct honor and pleasure for me, as President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the world organization of national parliaments, to address the UN General Assembly today on the agenda item of Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, a distinguished parliamentarian and former Speaker of Parliament, for his vision, energy and steadfast support for stronger engagement between the UN, parliaments and the IPU. I cannot but remark that the two men that presided over the adoption of landmark global commitments – the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and more recently the new Sustainable Development Agenda of 2015 – and I refer here to Mr. Theo Ben Gurirab of Namibia and Mr. Lykketoft of Denmark, were also prominent parliamentarians and active IPU members.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

You have before you the Report of the UN Secretary General, which provides an excellent overview of the comprehensive engagement between the United Nations system and the IPU, as well as between the UN and national parliaments – including through various regional and other parliamentary organizations, in a wide array of areas ranging from peace and security, to democracy and human rights, to climate change, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. I am sure you will join me in hailing the richness of this report which attests to the breadth and scope of our cooperation.

Clearly, our world today is faced with multiple challenges, unprecedented in their complexity and gravity. In many parts of the world, the rule of law and our basic rights and fundamental freedoms are under assault. Inequality and social injustice are on the rise. In the wake of massive humanitarian and political crises and the difficulties in managing the waves of migration that follow, populism and xenophobia are once again rearing their ugly head.

In the face of all this, the United Nations stands as the critical cornerstone for multilateralism, solidarity and cooperation among all nations. The IPU shares the objectives of the United Nations, it brings the perspective of parliamentarians as the direct voices of “we the peoples” and thereby complements and brings added value to the work of the United Nations. We are hence deeply committed to working with parliaments and parliamentarians around the world to promote peace and security, better understanding and cooperation, and a world free from want and free from fear for all citizens.

A lot has transpired since the last debate on this General Assembly agenda item two years ago. 2015 brought major international agreements in a number of key areas, including on the new Sustainable Development Goals, disaster risk reduction and climate change. Throughout the process leading up to these decisions, the IPU has been working to raise awareness and engage the global parliamentary community, helping to mobilize parliamentary action in shaping and following up on these major international commitments.

At our own general Assemblies, we have examined the main expectations that parliaments have for the 2030 Development Agenda, as well as the modalities of turning words into action. Time and time again, our members have underscored the need for democratic governance as an essential enabler for sustainable development, and as a goal in itself. This is the message we have brought to the United Nations, including at the highest level through the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, held in this very hall last year just a few weeks before the UN Summit. The Declaration of the World Conference of Speakers, submitted as a parliamentary contribution to the global talks on the SDGs, stressed the need for strong linkages between democracy, peace and sustainable development in the service of the people.

As we engage with parliaments, helping them become fit for purpose in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, we see SDG Goal 16 – peace, justice, rule of law and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels – as the natural entry point for our work in a variety of areas. This year we have been encouraging parliaments to examine and adopt their own resolutions on the SDGs, and in the process we have been convening a series of regional parliamentary seminars on issues of topical interest for the respective regions: a South Asian Parliamentary Summit held in late January in Dhaka focused on health and tobacco abuse, followed by a regional seminar in Bucharest for Central and Eastern Europe in April which tackled education for sustainable development. Other regional seminars are in the pipeline for the second half of the year, including one in cooperation with the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) in Panama and another in Africa in cooperation with the Parliament of Uganda.

We expect that the second Global Parliamentary Report, produced jointly with UNDP and to be issued towards the end of the year, will provide valuable insight on accountability and oversight, in particular as these relate to the implementation of the SDGs.

We have also expanded our work with parliaments in helping to bridge legislative gaps in meeting international commitments in a variety of areas – human rights including through a greater parliamentary involvement in the Universal Periodic Review conducted by the UN Human Rights Council, the elimination of discrimination against women, child and maternal health and discriminatory legislation as it relates to HIV-AIDS, climate change – including through the adoption of a Parliamentary Plan of Action in support of the Paris Agreement, as well as in efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism.

Just a few weeks ago, following up on our work with parliaments in Africa to enhance implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540, parliamentarians for the first time joined and contributed to the UN comprehensive review here in New York of international efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-State actors. For many years, the IPU has been supporting international efforts to advance nuclear disarmament – we have produced tools for parliamentarians, adopted robust political resolutions and are now closely following and supporting the work of the UN Open Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The partnership between the UN and the IPU has grown and evolved considerably over the past twenty years, and I am pleased to note that just a few days ago UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong signed a new and revised Cooperation Agreement between our two organizations, which takes stock of developments since 1996 when the initial agreement was concluded, places the institutional relationship on a stronger footing and sets the course for even closer cooperation in the years ahead. Needless to say, I welcome this positive development in our relations.

I also very much welcome the draft Resolution which is under consideration by the UN General Assembly today. It expresses strong support for interaction between the UN, parliaments and the IPU, and it identifies key areas of joint work ahead. I am confident that it will provide a valuable framework for taking our strategic partnership even further, for the good of our global community.

We have found in Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, an outstanding leader and a strong supporter of robust engagement with parliaments and the global parliamentary community. I wish, on behalf of the IPU to record our sincere thanks to him for his leadership.

I would also like to thank the Permanent Mission of my own country, Bangladesh, for stewarding the consultations among UN member States on this draft resolution. I further wish to thank each and every one of the many official sponsors of this resolution, and all those who have worked behind the scenes, UN and IPU staff, colleagues around the world, and everyone else who, in their own way – small or large - is making a difference for the good of us all. I sincerely hope that at the end of this debate, you will unreservedly lend your strong support to the resolution and thus give us a renewed mandate to pursue our cooperation for the common good.

Thank you for your attention.