



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

Thematic Debate of the General Assembly
Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges
and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015

Statement by Ambassador Anda Filip
Permanent Observer

United Nations
New York, 2 April 2008

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

It is my pleasure today to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and to express our appreciation to you for convening this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals. We have come now to the mid-point along a long journey that ends in 2015, so this is a good moment to evaluate what has been achieved, where corrections need to be made and what further efforts need to be deployed.

The IPU has been a strong supporter of the MDGs from the beginning. While we realize that human development will require much more than the attainment of the MDGs, it is undoubtedly useful for us to be guided by more specific goals and targets that – experts tell us – are totally within the realm of the possible. These goals provide a benchmark against which we can measure the strength of our commitment to development as a moral and political imperative. If we fail here we will have dealt a serious blow to the whole development enterprise. So we must persevere until we succeed.

Over the years, through a number of resolutions and debates, the IPU has sought to disseminate the MDGs among parliamentarians, as a way of stimulating a groundswell of activity at the legislative level. The parliamentary community, after all, has an important role and responsibility in this process: not only because of its legislative function, but also – in a very practical sense – in terms of ensuring necessary budgetary allocations to support a large array of pro-poor economic and social policies. An important illustration of our work on the MDGs will come in just two weeks time, at the 118th IPU Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa, whose overall theme will be *pushing back the frontiers of poverty*. This debate, like those that preceded it, will seek to build a better understanding among legislators of the concrete actions required to at least halve poverty by 2015, as set out in Goal 1, and will help identify some of the best practices that they should support in their concurrent roles as legislators, community leaders, and opinion-makers.

Turning now to the question before us today, that of the *challenges* to help countries achieve the MDGs in the remaining years, beginning with the overarching Goal 1, I wish to highlight three key critical areas from our perspective.

The first obvious challenge is to support more capacity building for more informed and effective policy-making. One thing is to make parliamentarians aware of official commitments and get them to agree to what needs to be done; but quite another is to actually enable members of parliament to better appreciate the fine points of competing policy options available to them as well as building the capacities of parliament as an institution with distinct and far-reaching responsibilities. While things have certainly improved in this domain, we are convinced that much more remains to be done and that the full potential of parliaments, especially but not exclusively in developing countries, to exercise their functions in a way that maximizes available resources and improves decision-making processes for development, remains largely untapped. We are hence investing a lot to help support parliaments in their functions.

One of our most recent initiatives in this respect consists of a new programme IPU is setting up with the Office of the High Representatives for the Least Developed Countries, to help parliaments in those countries better integrate the Brussels Programme of Action into their own agenda of work.

Another initiative that may be worth mentioning here is being conducted with UN-DESA and aims at strengthening the information and communication technology capacities of parliaments to both improve their working methods and become more open vis-à-vis the people they are elected to represent.

A second critical obstacle standing in the way of the MDGs that we are keen to help remove is that of funding. There is, as we know, a huge shortfall between current ODA allocations and the estimated cost of achieving the MDGs. ODA is a key source of development financing precisely for those countries that are now most off-track. It is not increasing at sufficient speed and its overall effectiveness continues to leave much to be desired. This is why the IPU will scale up its efforts in this domain, particularly by supporting the new Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC, where we work to provide a strong parliamentary input, including through the DCF Stakeholders' Forum. Long term, we will also seek to help parliamentarians master the intricacies of the ODA machineries in both donor and recipient countries, with the aim that every aid dollar spent achieves the best possible outcome.

In addition to ODA, we will continue to press for the whole agenda of financing for development to move forward, paying particular attention to the item on trade. Our members strongly believe in a fair, ruled based trade regime as one of the best ways for developing countries to raise the revenue they need for their development, without contracting new debts or having to depend on aid indefinitely. To this effect, we have set up a Parliamentary Conference on the WTO as a long-term consultative process to bring parliamentarians closer to the Doha Round trade negotiations and to make them more familiar with the decision-making processes of the WTO.

A third key issue that, in our view, remains to be resolved if we want to recover some of the lost ground on the road to the MDGs, has to do with the formulation of more incisive, coherent and inclusive national development plans. Although some countries have managed to vastly improve their development planning, there is still a long way to go to ensure that national development plans are internally sound and consistent with actual priorities on the ground. In part, this is a function of weak capacities, as mentioned above, as well as of the way in which national development plans are drawn up and adopted, which often enough do not involve parliaments meaningfully. But in part it is also the result of misguided ideas about the true drivers of the development process that continue to inform decision makers at both national and international levels.

Two key areas that have tended to be neglected, at least in relative terms, within national development plans are those of employment creation and gender equality. We are more than ever convinced that the decent work agenda needs to be put squarely at the center of national development plans if we are to make a serious leap forward in virtually all of the MDGs. To this effect, we will seek to work with the ILO to make sure that parliaments understand that agenda and actively stand behind it. Last but not least, policies targeting the specific needs of women, as key economic and political agents, must also receive more attention in national development plans. The IPU will continue to support this in many ways, including by helping more women participate in politics, where they are severely under-represented, and by helping parliaments integrate a gender perspective into the budgetary process.

This year's parliamentary meeting at the UN, in the context of the Commission on the Status of Women, was particularly meaningful. Some 120 legislators from over fifty countries attended – among them, many sitting on the select committees for equal opportunities and gender equality, as well as those responsible for finance and budget. Their discussions yielded some very interesting recommendations and good practices in the area of gender budgeting, and the participating MPs returned home not just with a better understanding of UN processes, but also with some clear ideas about what they can do to make a difference in this important area.

In conclusion, Mr. President, the IPU is committed to continuing its efforts to bring about progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Thank you.