



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

S T A T E M E N T

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**at the United Nations *Ad hoc* Working Group on Revitalization of the
General Assembly**

New York, 6 April 2006

Distinguished co-Chairs,

Thank you for your kind invitation to address this current session of the United Nations *ad hoc* working group on Revitalization of the General Assembly.

I have followed with great interest your deliberations over the past weeks. Throughout these discussions there seems to be broad agreement on a couple of key issues.

First, revitalization of the General Assembly presupposes both streamlining and rendering working methods more effective. It also requires enhancing the role and authority of the Assembly. Technical improvement of working methods alone will not empower the General Assembly. Real political empowerment is also needed.

Second, real empowerment means that Member States have to demonstrate greater political will, which implicitly entails a commitment to ensure that General Assembly resolutions are indeed acted upon.

Let me now address these two points from a parliamentary perspective. In so doing I will base myself on the discussions that have so far taken place within the IPU, including the political declaration adopted by the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament held here, at the United Nations Headquarters, in early September last year, as well as recent consultations with IPU's leadership on the subject of United Nations reform.

The General Assembly was set up sixty years ago to be the main deliberative, policy-making, legislative and representative organ of the United Nations. It drew inspiration from parliamentary practice at the time. Since then, the General Assembly has evolved and so have parliaments.

Over the years, many parliaments in both developed and developing countries have modernized their structures and working methods to make them more accessible to citizens and others who can contribute to parliamentary work, improve the effectiveness of committees, streamline parliament's agenda, improve its voting systems, and ensure greater accountability of its office holders. Many parliaments have been successful in this endeavor.

The IPU believes that these parliamentary experiences could be of value to the General Assembly when one considers how best to improve on its structures and working methods. Should you agree that this proposal has merit, **the IPU would be pleased to convene a representative group of legislators to share their good practices**. The IPU would also be open to the idea of working with the United Nations Secretariat on a report examining parliamentary practices that may be relevant and of interest to the General Assembly, its functional committees, and perhaps even the regional groups.

We come now to the question of political will. The IPU is convinced that members of parliaments can play an extraordinarily important role in building national political support for international action. In IPU's view, which is shared by many UN Member States, the United Nations stands to gain considerably by making sure that parliaments and their members have a full and undistorted understanding of major processes and activities under way at the United Nations.

The more members of parliament are aware of the deliberations and negotiations taking place at the United Nations and of their outcome, including the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the more they are likely to engage actively in their implementation. In other words, associating members of parliaments more closely with the United Nations, will lead to their more active involvement in ratifying intergovernmental agreements, adopting or amending legislation, translating international commitments into concrete action at the national level, voting budgets and holding governments to account.

The IPU also believes that parliaments and their members can make a more direct contribution to the work of the United Nations. Members of parliament possess unique insight gained from their close relationship with the people and from the political negotiations in which they are involved every day.

The global challenges facing the world today demand a committed response from everybody acting in concert – from civil society and non-governmental organizations to the business community and the private sector, and undoubtedly national parliaments. As the President of the General Assembly very pointedly remarked just last week, it is imperative that the realities of the world be brought into the General Assembly Hall and that the disconnect between the United Nations decision-making process and the national policies, between the global and the local, be bridged. Members of parliament would be the most natural partner in this exercise.

These are some of the reasons underlying IPU's quest to facilitate closer cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments. The IPU is grateful for the support UN Member States have expressed for this vision, most recently in paragraph 171 of the United Nations Summit Outcome Document, in which 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, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of the work of the United Nations and ensuring the effective implementation of United Nations reform”*.

In the view of the IPU, the foregoing constitutes a sound legislative basis on which to build. The following three suggestions are offered to help put into practice this broad commitment to cooperation.

The first of these relates to political interaction. Here at United Nations Headquarters, the IPU has been convening a series of parliamentary meetings – open to all parliaments from the UN Member States - on a variety of global issues. The annual parliamentary hearing in the Fall during the General Assembly, the Spring parliamentary session on gender equality in the context of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, parliamentary panel discussions on innovative forms of financing for development or the governance component of the Least Developed Countries review process are some examples. In all of these instances, the IPU mobilizes experts from parliamentary committees and brings them together to work on topical international issues.

In order to bring this process one step forward, the IPU proposes to **make the annual parliamentary hearing part of the agenda of the General Assembly**. The hearing could serve as a political sounding board for the General Assembly on some of the key issues on its own agenda. At the same time, it would expose members of parliament to the work of the General Assembly and enlist their support in raising political will and enhancing implementation of General Assembly decisions.

Should Member States agree, the IPU would propose to work closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly in drawing up the agenda for the hearing. It would be convened jointly by the United Nations General Assembly and IPU, and its conclusions would be circulated formally as documents of the General Assembly. These conclusions could serve as a consultative contribution to the work of the GA, and would be submitted for consideration and action by parliaments at the national level. Some of the major regional parliamentary assemblies and organizations could also be closely associated in the process.

A second building block relates to information. The IPU is committed to keeping parliaments better informed of United Nations activities. The IPU could make a start by providing parliaments with more detailed information on the decisions of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. Here as well, the IPU could work closely with the Office of the General Assembly President, as well as with the United Nations secretariat. The IPU would also be willing to explore the possibility of submitting reports to the United Nations on deliberations and action undertaken by national parliaments on UN-related issues. Such reports could be accompanied, if necessary, by a set of practical recommendations. Establishing a procedure for the President of the General Assembly to address parliaments and parliamentarians on a regular basis might also be worth examining.

A third building block could consist of setting up a joint consultative mechanism between the United Nations and the IPU. Such a mechanism could serve as a forum for consultations between the United Nations and the IPU on the activities suggested above. It would also offer the United Nations an opportunity to formulate subjects on which it would welcome a parliamentary input and submit them as agenda items for future IPU Assemblies. Such a mechanism might also be a means of enabling

parliamentary leaders to make suggestions on the content of the General Assembly agenda.

All these proposals relate to the contribution that parliaments and their members can make to strengthen and revitalize the General Assembly, and the IPU looks forward to hearing the views of UN Member States.

Before I close, let me make the point that the IPU is already working with the United Nations in a variety of ways. On the field we have joint projects with UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO and other agencies to build capacities and provide technical assistance to representative institutions in developing countries and countries emerging from conflict. We now look forward to developing a meaningful working relationship with both the UN Democracy Fund and the new Peace-Building Commission, and to extending to these bodies IPU's unique parliamentary expertise.

We believe this is of great significance since the work of both these United Nations organs is based on the fundamental principle that effective and viable representative institutions are essential to national reconciliation, peace-building and democratic progress.

The practical proposals presented to you today are a natural extension of the partnership we have been building with the United Nations over the years. They do not require a great deal of effort or new resources – most of which the IPU is ready to provide. What they do require, however, is vision and the willingness to take this reform process of the United Nations as far as it needs to go.

Thank you.