



## 2006 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations



**ECOSOC Chamber  
13 - 14 November 2006**

***“Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building:  
Reinforcing the Key Role of the United Nations”***

**Introductory statement by the IPU President  
Hon. Pier Ferdinando Casini**

Madam President,  
Mr. Deputy Secretary-General,  
Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen

There are many conflicts smouldering in the world, and many situations where peace remains fragile.

Conflict is not inevitable even in the most tense confrontations. With political will and material support it is possible to diffuse it and spare the lives of countless victims. Peace cannot be taken for granted until people have come together for dialogue and reconciliation. In both conflict prevention and peace building, the international community must provide assistance.

That is matter of moral duty. It is also common sense, because once conflict starts in one place, it can spread and cause havoc in the region and beyond. No situation, big or small, should be ignored, and it is wrong to be preoccupied only with certain countries or regions. There is nothing more odious than the assumption that we can ignore certain conflicts because they do not appear relevant to our immediate interests.

In the past year or so the United Nations has done much to improve the way the international community can help prevent conflict and fortify peace. It has set up a Peacebuilding Commission, a Human Rights Council, and a Democracy Fund (UNDEF). And it has renewed its efforts in the area of development so as to better tackle poverty and social exclusion, a root cause of unrest.

But as experience has shown, the UN cannot act alone. It needs allies who can open up new paths of dialogue and understanding and help address grievances within a fractured body politic. We, the parliamentarians and the political leaders closest to the people on the ground, are best situated to provide support and, in some cases, lead the way.

That is why I welcome this year's Hearing. Given the many points of tension around the world, it is a great opportunity for parliamentarians to examine some of the most important issues in conflict prevention and peace building from their unique perspective. It is also an opportunity for United Nations representatives to debrief us on policy changes and developments on the ground. We are here to learn from each other, and figure out how the United Nations and parliaments can support each other when it comes to conflict prevention and peace building.

This is just one example of the growing cooperation between the UN and the IPU. As the resolution adopted by the General Assembly last October attests, the two organizations are working together on virtually every item on the agenda for peace, democracy and development. The concern with democracy in particular is central to our joint action, as we saw recently at the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference on New and Restored Democracies in Doha. Democracy, together with development, is the best insurance against conflict and the best guarantee for lasting peace. The recent memorandum of understanding between the IPU and the UN Democracy Fund augurs well for increased cooperation in this area in the years to come.

The resolution also calls for a leap forward in the way we conduct consultations such as this annual hearing. I am extremely pleased that our meetings at the United Nations will now have the status of *joint* events. The formal recognition of the joint nature of these events will require the United Nations to take partial ownership of them. I hope that we will soon sit down together to see how we can better integrate the Hearing and the other specialized meetings that we conduct here during the year into the UN's overall agenda and meeting schedule.

As the resolution also says, the IPU is now invited to be more closely involved in the elaboration of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations "with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments to the work of the United Nations." That provision will help us improve the coordination of our respective operational activities so that we can better support each other in the field. It will also help us plan future activities in the light of the recommendations that may come out of the annual hearing and other specialized meetings.

Secretary General Kofi Annan's travel schedule prevented him from being with us today. We know that the extraordinary developments in this partnership between the United Nations and parliaments would not have been possible without his vision, leadership and personal commitment. We wish him success in his future work.

The subject of conflict prevention and peace building is very broad and inevitably our agenda is selective. Our panel includes parliamentarians with direct experience of these issues and senior UN officials and academics. I hope that we will have a frank and constructive discussion that will lead to some strong recommendations both for the UN and for our members.

Thank you.