



2008 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations



**ECOSOC Chamber
20 - 21 November 2008**

Effective peacekeeping and the prevention of conflict: Delivering on our commitments

(ECOSOC Chamber, 20-21 November 2008)

Opening Remarks by Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the IPU

I am very pleased to be back in this Chamber where I have spent such a large part of my life. I first came here as a UN fellow more than forty years ago and I have worked here as the representative as SWAPO, then as Ambassador of my country, thereafter as Foreign Minister and as President of the General Assembly. I am now back having just recently been elected President of the IPU and I am particularly pleased at the prospect that this offers me to renew my work with the United Nations.

I wish to welcome all of you to this year's joint United Nations and IPU Parliamentary Hearing. I am particularly pleased to welcome the President of the General Assembly, Padre Miguel D'Escoto and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon. You have both very busy schedules and I therefore give you the floor right away. Mr. President D'Escoto, may I ask you to start.

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It is now my turn formally to open this parliamentary hearing. When I do that I would like to thank UN Member States for having adopted by consensus last Tuesday a very substantive resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU. The resolution draws inspiration from the Secretary-General's excellent report in which he makes very constructive recommendations for strengthening that cooperation.

The resolution sets clear and ambitious targets for the next two years. We shall be working more closely in all major fields, including in relation to peace, development and democracy. I encourage all of you to study carefully the resolution which is available in this room in document A/63/L.26.

Mr. Secretary-General, in your report you highlight many examples of the IPU helping to mobilize parliaments in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

Having myself presided over the drafting of the Millennium Declaration, I am committed to redoubling this effort particularly in relation to poverty reduction and gender equality. Let me add that I am adamant that parliaments must lead by example and women must be better represented in parliaments and in the IPU.

I also want to stress that I intend to make special efforts in relation to the protection of children and support for people with disabilities. And I will pursue as vigorously as I can the parliamentary campaign launched last year to build political momentum in support of the current negotiations to address climate change.

We live in exceptional times. The world faces a series of crisis – climate change, food crisis, energy crisis, financial crisis, economic crisis. Last month the IPU Assembly debated the latest in this series of crisis and asked me as a matter of urgency to organize a global parliamentary conference. We intend to do so in the early part of next year. We will then examine the financial crisis and its ramifications and identify avenues for greater parliamentary involvement to provide oversight, transparency and accountability both at the national and the international level.

The situation we face is of course very grave, but we should also realize that it creates an opportunity which must not be missed. I agree with you, Mr. President, that all countries have a stake in this and must therefore also be consulted and part the solution. Let me also say, that I support the Secretary-General's idea of a new multilateralism and I very much hope that we can advance this idea through the parliamentary conference to which I have just referred. We also need to start making real progress towards a good faith package and I think that the FFD conference starting in Doha next week can give an important impetus in this direction.

Speaking about multilateralism, I welcome the focus which the General Assembly President has placed on the need to democratize the United Nations. As you know, the IPU has paid considerable attention to this issue and the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament that convened in the Assembly in 2005 – I took part in that event and helped draft the outcome document – formulated several proposals how parliaments can help bridge the democracy gap in international relations. I will want us to follow up on them as we move forward.

As part of that process, the IPU also pays particular attention to UN reform at the national level. Yesterday, we held an interactive panel discussion in which we presented the report on the recent IPU mission to Tanzania, one of the pilot countries where the UN is seeking to respond to the country's development needs in a more coherent and effective manner. That mission made several important recommendations which are now all being implemented and which, amongst other things, have the effect of including the national parliament in this process in a meaningful manner. We look forward to continue this process.

Allow me now to turn to our agenda for this Joint Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations. This year marks the 60th anniversary of UN peacekeeping and it is therefore very timely to have a good debate on the subject “*Towards effective peacekeeping and the prevention of conflict: Delivering on our commitments*”.

I am particularly pleased at the opportunity this also offers us to examine what we can do together to put a stop to sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict and to end impunity. I also look forward to discussing our responsibility to protect and to learn more of what we can do to use this concept in a constructive manner for States and the international community to protect people everywhere.

With those few remarks, I hereby declare this hearing officially opened.

I now wish to accompany the President of the General Assembly and the UN Secretary-General so we will take a short break of two minutes. Meanwhile, may I ask the Moderator and panelists for the first session to take their seat at the head table.

Thank you