



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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## **Statement by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union at the Opening of the Annual Parliamentary Hearing (19 November 2009)**

Distinguished United Nations Secretary-General,  
Distinguished President of the United Nations General Assembly,  
Honorable Parliamentarians  
Dear friends,

I will begin by acknowledging the presence here of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki. Speaking as one who has sat in the same chair, I wish him well in the tasks ahead.

I also wish to salute the presence here of the United Nations Secretary General, and I do so with gratitude. I would like to thank Mr. Ban for the hospitality he has offered us in this house for this annual hearing.

I also wish to thank him for enabling us to meet for two days at the start of the week. Some twenty Speakers of Parliament, some of whom are with us today, gathered here to make preparations for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference of Speakers of Parliament that will meet in July next year. Mr. Secretary-General, I thank you for accepting our invitation to be present at that major parliamentary event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this fresh November morning, we could be forgiven for feeling that all is well with the world. Yet almost everything we hear and read tells us that the world is in a very bad way. If you find this puzzling, let me tell you that you are in good company, for I do too.

My dear friends, let us take a step backwards and look at the broader picture. I am well placed to do this with you. I can boast age and experience. And I know the heartbeat of parliament and the pulse of the United Nations, two rhythms that are sometimes discordant, sometimes harmonious.

It seems to me that we should start from the simple premise that our planet is inhabited by those who have enough to survive with decency, and those who do not. In this room many of us represent the poor, meet the poor, and advocate their causes. But we do not ourselves suffer from poverty. Whatever the political, the ideological differences that have divided us in the past, and I for one know about fighting for ideals, today's biggest, most glaring divide is between those who are poor, and those who are not.

I read in the newspapers of this great city that the crisis is over. The forces that drive the world's strongest economies are maybe tougher than we thought. Thanks to massive government intervention, we are not facing meltdown, nor even - it would seem - a recession. Growth is starting to pick up. Things are looking better than people had dare hope.

But there is another side to the coin, and it has less shine on it. In fact it has no shine at all. This calamity is still with us, and it is here to stay. The employment crisis is only just beginning, and it will be with us for another half decade, at the very least. In countries rich and poor, the number of people scratching and scraping for a day-to-day existence has soared. If this is a recovery, then it is one that generates no jobs and very little hope.

Alongside this, we are struggling to address the food crisis. The projections are grim. It is a crisis not only of production, but of distribution, quality and affordability. A massive effort is required by the international community to feed the world's hungry millions.

Indeed food insecurity and climate change are twin crises that jeopardize human survival. There is no point in talking about economic recovery while we destroy our planet. It makes no sense. There must, I repeat must, be an agreement at next months Conference of Parties in Copenhagen, and I appeal to all of you to lobby hard with your ministers to ensure this is so.

I am no economist. But taking the facts at face value, it seems strange to me that we have one trillion dollars to spare to help the banking institutions that failed us last year, and we only have the smallest proportion of that sum to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

It is our job as parliamentarians to think about these distortions, and to help forge the consciousness of how things really are and how they might be. It is our task to bring the voice of the people to the United Nations, and to bring the message of the United Nations back to them.

I started on an optimistic note, and that is how I intend to close. Crises are also opportunities. Perhaps the winds of change have not been blowing with sufficient force, but there is still time for the ship of State to turn to face the new breeze, for politics to be enlivened with more radical change. I hope that some sense of that will emerge in the coming two days.

It is our duty now to bring the local concerns back from the villages, the street corners, the bars and cafes, those places where strong opinions are formed, back into these halls of power to inform the thinking therein.

If we can do that, even to a small extent, then we will not have failed. More than that, I will not say. I wish you a vibrant and productive meeting.

Thank you.