



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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146th IPU Assembly Manama (11–15 March 2023)

Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Inaugural Ceremony of the 146th IPU Assembly

Manama, 11 March 2023

Before anything else, may I depart from protocol, with the permission of the Director of ceremonies, and invite all of us to observe a few moments in memory of those people who, since we met in Kigali in October 2022, have passed away, for a variety of reasons, including those that have been mentioned by the dignitaries that have taken the floor before me. His Excellency the Prime Minister and Madam President of the 61st session of the U.N. General Assembly, they have mentioned national catastrophes, most recently earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. They have mentioned war, civil strife, terrorism, all sorts of crises that have taken a human toll that is beyond reason. I would therefore like for us all, kindly, to in our own way, individual way, observe a few moments in memory of all those victims.

(Moment of silence)

Thank you very much.

Your Excellency, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, representing His Majesty the King of this great land Bahrain,
Your Excellency the Speaker of the House of Representatives of Bahrain,
Your Excellency the Speaker of the Shura Council of Bahrain,
Honourable President of the IPU,
Your Excellency Ms. Haya Al Khalifa, President of the 61st session of the U.N. General Assembly,
Distinguished Speakers and Deputy Speakers of parliament, delegates, representatives of partner organizations,

It gives me great pleasure to address you this evening here in Bahrain. Let me pre-empt the President of the IPU—I am sure he is going to do it in a more profuse manner. I would like to thank you, the Authorities of this great land of Bahrain and its leadership under His Majesty the King. I also want to acknowledge the support that we have received from the government, parliament and people of Bahrain as we congregate here in Manama.

Ladies and gentlemen, this morning, as I was preparing my notes for this speech, I did ask my colleagues, how many people are here in Manama from abroad to attend this Assembly? They told me that we had something like one thousand seven hundred delegates here, most of them parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, members of different partner organizations, including some sixty speakers of parliament from across the globe. I said great, this is something that we need to celebrate.

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I then also thought of the skies, those satellites that are going around circumnavigating the world and watching every human activity. I imagine that they must be wondering what is happening in Bahrain, here with thousands of people congregating in one spot. There must be some red spot there. I am glad to say that all parliamentary roads lead to Bahrain these days and we have cause to be proud of that. I say this because the array of participants here tonight is reflective of the human race itself, the diversity that we embody, we are of different backgrounds, religions, races, cultures, political affiliations, but we are united here over the next several days in service to humankind.

I would like to record our gratitude to Bahrain for offering the IPU the opportunity to play its role as the global convener of parliaments. We have 130 parliaments represented here.

If it had been possible to have all 178 parliaments here, if it had been possible to have all 45'000 parliamentarians worldwide here, I am sure that the Authorities of Bahrain would have loved to have that and the IPU would have loved that too. But I dare to say that we do have a representative sample of the people out there, and that whatever will be coming out of your deliberations will be something that is representative of the broad interests of the people of the world today.

I am grateful because Bahrain gives us the opportunity to bring people together, people of different thoughts that would then have a very safe environment to carry out deliberations with freedom of expression, respectful of the views of one another.

In a nutshell, we have the opportunity here to give voice to all the people of the world, to the 45'000 parliamentarians and by extension, to some eight billion people on this planet.

I, therefore, wish to express my strong hope that our deliberations will be devoid and bereft of self serving rhetoric, arrogance, inflammatory intolerance, and outrances and that we will live up to the dignity and standards of parliamentary life as we have known them in our various jurisdictions.

Secondly, your Excellency, I want to thank you and your colleagues for allowing the IPU to play its role as bridge-builder.

During the next several days, there will be a host of meetings here: bilateral, multilateral, and otherwise. The IPU itself and its formal structures will be convening meetings that are intended to bring people together, to close that gap between people and to come up with solutions that are consensual.

We will have meetings of an important mechanism such as the Committee on Middle East Questions trying to bring together positions regarding strife in the Middle East. We will have meetings of the Cyprus Committee, looking at how we can bridge the gap between the different communities in Cyprus. I want to use this opportunity—I hope the Israeli delegation will forgive me as I say this—yesterday I was very honoured to meet the high-level delegation from Israel. I am sure you will agree with me that several years ago, it would not have been possible to have them here in this country and that is the concrete expression of the peaceful coexistence that we are all clamouring for.

That you may have differences, you may have different opinions, but you are willing to come together, and I salute Bahrain for giving us that opportunity to live up to the foundational values of this organization, dialogue for a resolution of disputes. I am sure that the founding fathers of this organization, Cremer and Passy, would be smiling in their graves to see the sons and daughters of different opinions coming together in common cause to humankind.

I, therefore, believe that over the next several days, parliamentary diplomacy, which is complementary to the traditional form of diplomacy will be in full display in Bahrain.

Before I conclude, I want to say a few words about democracy because there has been a lot of hype about what democracy is, the presence or absence of democracy around the world. Mr. President, I am sure that you will have a few words about this but let me say that democracy is an

aspiration; it is never a final product. It is always work in progress; it is always something that we need to perfect on a daily basis. I say this because we meet in a country that has made a lot of progress when it comes to inclusiveness, a country that has made great strides in terms of gender equality.

We can say today when we look at the data on Bahrain that the parliament is edging towards gender parity and is a trailblazer in the region. I did my homework and I discovered that women account for 20% of membership in the parliament here. The average in this region is 17.7%, which means that Bahrain is above the regional average. It is closer to the global average, which I was pleased to announce a few days ago, of 26.5% worldwide. I want to use this opportunity therefore to urge the Authorities of this country to be more vigilant and more robust in promoting gender equality because I have had cause to see that women and men contribute effectively to the wellbeing of society.

So, I want to conclude by saying that we should all echo what is said in the IPU's strategy in terms of its vision. We want a world where every voice counts. We want democracy for all and democracy that delivers on the expectations of all the people and not just a group of individuals. A democracy that, in terms of the SDGs leaves no one behind, because democracy may be advanced, human rights may be advanced, all the hallmarks of democracy may be advanced but if this does not translate into concrete products beneficial to the people, then it is meaningless.

So, I hope that the decisions that will be taken here will go towards democracy, meaning to all people in this world.

We want the Assembly here to lead to strong decisions for parliaments to promote the development agenda, access to health care, universal health coverage, access to schools for children, access to education in general and job opportunities for young people. It is only then that parliaments and by extension, the IPU, can stay relevant to the global community.

So, remember, democracy for everyone, democracy that delivers for everyone.

Thank you very much.