



**Speech of the Executive Head a.i. at the
115th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**Geneva
17 October 2006**

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Last June, the Representative of the SG on and Member ex-officio of the Board of the Democracy Fund, Mr. Amir Dossal, had been invited to brief the 114th Assembly in Nairobi about the establishment of the Fund. We are very happy to have yet another opportunity to update the Assembly on the progress accomplished since, and to be part, as President Cassini has just said, of the considerable development of a partnership between IPU and the UN family.

As you know, democracy is not a new topic of the UN. The UN has been one of the intellectual drivers that have promoted democracy since World War II, from good governance to electoral assistance to human rights. We are probably on the path of creating a universal paradigm of democracy as a set of values, principles and institutions that need to be in place to allow any society to be free. The United Nations is also developing the strategies needed to bring about transition to democracy in non-democratic countries; to consolidate democracy in newly democratized nations; and to move beyond the existing levels of democracy in the older democratic systems.

This is why the UN has felt particularly comfortable, when opening this new sphere of activities in the late seventies, with parliaments, parliamentarians and organisations of parliamentarianism. The UN has worked together with you on a range of issues, including women's empowerment, constitutional reform, political party law and electoral reform, security sector oversight, accountability and anti-corruption, and ensuring that policies are targeted to meet the needs of the people, in line with objectives laid out in the Millennium Development Goals.

It is in this context that the IPU has been the United Nation's global and preferred partner, our source of guidance and an indispensable reference for our work.

In order to further strengthen the UN's activities to support democracy, the Secretary-General announced the creation of the UN Democracy Fund at the African Union summit in Syrte in July 2005.

The 2005 UN World Summit reaffirmed democracy as "a universal value" while indicating that "there is no single model of democracy, that it does not belong to any country or region". It resolved to "strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to assist Member States upon their request" in democracy-building matters and welcomed "the establishment of a Democracy Fund at the United Nations".

It was obvious that the Fund's Office would immediately seek to establish a partnership with the IPU Secretariat in order to become its newest UN interface, together with the other departments and programmes that are the traditional UN associates of the Inter-parliamentary Union.

To date, the Fund has received more than US\$ 51 million in pledges and contributions from 22 Member States, in many cases after receiving the endorsement of the Parliaments you represent. This political and financial support comes from nations in Africa, Asia, Arab States, the Americas, Europe – East and West, North and South- and the Pacific. From Senegal to Chile and from the US to India, from Germany, France and Spain to Hungary, Indonesia and Mongolia, the Fund has become a truly multilateral and multicultural endeavour. And we have started now working with 125 global and local project partners after calling for the first round of proposals.

The initial response from applicants to the Fund is powerful evidence of the strong demand for support from the UN for this very important agenda. Funded projects will promote civic education, electoral support and political parties, democratic dialogue and constitutional processes, civil society empowerment, accountability, transparency and integrity, human rights and fundamental freedoms and access to information. We are very pleased that the Fund will support two projects of the IPU that Secretary-General Johnson has mentioned in his report. We are also glad to see that other parliamentary actors have been successful in this first tranche of **allocations**.

This quick review of our activities point out to the need for us to work closely with parliamentarians and with the IPU and to help create a normative shift in terms of how parliaments contribute to democratic processes. We believe that it is important for the international community to pay as much attention to Houses of Parliament as to Electoral Commissions, and to consolidate their work through the continuum of democratic representation. We sense that we have reached a consensus today, also thanks to the work of the UN, on what constitutes free, fair and regular elections; what a democratic and representative parliament ought to be; we have international norms for free press, autonomous civil society, independent and predictable justice; we even have a UN convention to establish minima of transparency, integrity and accountability.

The UN democracy Fund also believes that we may, in the future, need an international standard on democracy promotion beyond borders, to delineate democracy-building

activities acceptable to all and distinguish it from less legitimate interference and foreign meddling in domestic politics, with the goal of ultimately defining the instances in which democrats can and should be supported by other democrats from abroad when harassed from within.

In order to strengthen our capacity to work together we have jointly decided to formalize our ongoing collaboration. The agreement we shall hopefully sign today will be a formal instrument of mutual recognition, and we are pleased that the IPU will be the first organisation to formalize such agreement with us.

To conclude, let me say, on a personal note, that I am especially beholden to President Cassini and Secretary-General Anders Johnson for having invited me to speak before an institution, which I learned to admire when my father, a long-standing parliamentarian in our country, had relevant responsibilities in this house.

I thank you very much for your attention.