

PARLIAMENTS' ROLE IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

*Resolution adopted unanimously by the 108th Conference
(Santiago de Chile, 11 April 2003)*

The 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference,

Reaffirming the principles enshrined in the IPU's "Universal Declaration on Democracy" adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session (September 1997, Cairo),

Recalling the Declaration of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments entitled "The Parliamentary Vision for International Cooperation at the Dawn of the Third Millennium", adopted on 1 September 2000,

Recalling also the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 8 September 2000 which sets out the Millennium Development Goals as internationally agreed targets for poverty eradication, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 2002,

Reaffirming that democracy is both an ideal to be pursued and a mode of government to be applied according to modalities which reflect the diversity of experiences and cultural particularities without derogating from internationally recognised principles and norms and that it is thus a constantly perfected and always perfectible state or condition whose progress will depend upon a variety of political, social, economic and cultural factors,

Acknowledging that national parliaments represent the basis for good governance grounded on democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, gender equality and a favourable atmosphere and environment for investment,

Recognising that parliamentary institutions make an indispensable contribution to the achievement of meaningful democratic control and accountability through their scrutiny of the activities of governments, by:

- Relying on their constitutional authority to authorise, among other government legislative initiatives, the revenue-raising and spending measures of governments as a means of ensuring their cooperation,
- Conducting substantive scrutiny using a variety of practices that are specific to individual jurisdictions, including oral question periods and the entitlement to address written questions to ministers, committee hearings and other practices that support financial scrutiny,
- Providing citizens, both directly and through the mass media, with the information needed to hold governments accountable and to contribute constructively to the processes used to produce policy and legislation relating to democratisation and human development, both at home and abroad,

Emphasising the central role of democratic institutions in ensuring successful long-term human development, by:

- Using effective electoral, parliamentary and other mechanisms to create the conditions for ensuring that governments are responsive to the needs and interests of the governed,
- Ensuring that governments maintain the levels of popular legitimacy required both for effective governmental action with respect to human development and other issues, and for the civil order that is a precondition for effective governance,

Stressing the important role of parliaments as legitimate representatives of the people in strengthening democratisation in multilateral institutions and furthering human development,

Convinced that respect for human rights is not only a fundamental value in itself but also essential to developing stable, democratic and prosperous societies that are capable of living together in peace,

Recognising that education is a key to human development, and *acknowledging* that parliaments have a vital responsibility to guarantee free universal education without any discrimination whatsoever, as this hastens the pace of economic, social and political development and fosters cultural and spiritual advancement,

Noting that countries that have developed effective macroeconomic policies, established robust public institutions, maintained domestic political stability and strengthened the rule of law, supported by investments in people through better health and education, have generally achieved strong economic growth and made progress towards poverty reduction,

Convinced that the side-effects of globalisation and certain policies are, in some cases, inconsistent with the very concept of human development, and *stressing* the need for developing countries to realise that any progress, whether economic or social, is contingent upon their ability to create the necessary national will to face the challenges imposed on them by the new global system,

Stressing that persistent extreme poverty deprives citizens of full and effective enjoyment of human rights and of participation in democratic processes in each society,

Concerned that efforts to build strong democratic institutions while working towards sustainable human development encounter numerous challenges, such as poverty, corruption, globalisation, lack of resources, discrimination, transnational crime, civil strife, environmental degradation and overpopulation,

Expressing concern at the growth of terrorism, which poses a serious threat to democratic institutions, and its repercussions on human development,

Also expressing concern at the growing divide between rich and poor countries,

Emphasising the need to grant debt relief to the poor countries, address the causes of debt and take measures to ensure that indebtedness does not recur,

Stressing the need to redouble efforts to combat HIV/AIDS,

Recognising that volunteerism builds strong cohesive communities, encourages participation in the democratic process and reduces social tensions by forging a common view,

1. *Urges* governments and parliaments to acknowledge their collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level;
2. *Calls on* all the parliaments in the world to work for democracy based on the freely expressed will of the people through free and fair elections to choose their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and participate fully in every sphere of their lives and, in this context, to affirm the universal need to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels;
3. *Calls on* governments to promote the participation of all sections of society, in particular women, the disadvantaged and minorities, in the decision-making process;

4. *Urges* the governments and parliaments of all countries to foster participation by their citizens in political decision-making, shielded from undue interference from institutionalised pressure groups, by creating, through democratic means, decentralised representative institutions vested with real power and endowed with adequate financial resources, and instituting channels for this purpose that are consistent with the spirit of their Constitution and traditions;
5. *Stresses* the need to reinforce cooperation between the United Nations and its organs and agencies and national parliaments with a view to furthering peace, security and development, abiding strictly by the principles of human dignity and equity;
6. *Urges* all States and multilateral institutions, including the IPU, to continue providing practical support to strengthen political structures such as parliaments and their committees, local governments, electoral commissions and political parties and to uphold democratic processes, and particularly free elections, so that these essential political systems operate with sufficient power, responsibility and authority to reflect the interests of the people as a whole; in this regard, *encourages* the IPU and the UNDP to pursue their cooperation in strengthening parliamentary institutions, and in implementing a strategic partnership within their respective development agendas;
7. *Stresses* the need for parliaments to submit regular reports on the state of democracy and human development in the world, to serve as working and consultative papers for the drafting of national policy;
8. *Encourages* all States to ratify and implement the international human rights instruments in their widest possible sense, which constitute the basis of democracy;
9. *Urges* the United Nations to extend the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to cover any form of political activity that derives from hate and violence;
10. *Recommends* the development of the natural function of parliament as the mediator between the public and international organisations and institutions, and parliament's systematic rapprochement with the NGOs that play a major role within civil society;
11. *Requests* the IPU Secretary General to arrange for the IPU to make a substantive contribution, including the circulation of a document on the IPU and democracy, to the 5th International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in June 2003 in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia);
12. *Stresses* the urgent need to reform existing multilateral institutions by promoting democratic principles to ensure that their policies and programmes meet the interests of and benefit all nations; and *reaffirms* that the United Nations is the only legitimate multilateral institution responsible for world peace and security and must perform its role and functions in compliance with the principles of international law and its Charter;
13. *Urges* parliaments around the world to make maximum use of existing processes for exerting legislative influence, financial control, scrutiny and accountability in support of a global democratisation and human development agenda, and to experiment with special debates, public consultations, committee studies and other initiatives designed to mobilise governments and world public opinion in favour of democratic institutions and human development;
14. *Encourages* parliaments to develop parliamentary diplomacy activities and to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
15. *Urges* parliaments, in this regard, to devote ever closer attention to international issues and particularly to development financing, debt, poverty reduction, human rights, gender equality, the rights of the child, and the right to education, and to routinely take account of this dimension when legislating;
16. *Also urges* parliaments to put into place the necessary structures to monitor and oversee the international negotiations conducted by governments, particularly when they need to be subsequently enacted into legislation;
17. *Requests* governments to ensure that all useful information relating to such negotiations is submitted to parliament, both in the negotiation phase and when implementing decisions, encompassing all texts, including those which do not require enactment into domestic law;

18. *Emphasises* the central role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as the world organisation of parliaments, in making a key contribution to strengthening democracy in its relations with international institutions and to keeping world peace;
19. *Acknowledges* that, to achieve peace and security through social and economic stability, international institutions must offer the countries of the world the aid required to ensure reasonable standards of living, in contrast to the present disparities between rich and poor countries;
20. *Underscores* the importance of establishing an international and regional strategy for human development focused on attaining sustainable economic growth and combating poverty, and of supporting and expanding integration-promoting institutions through national political participation in policy formulation and legislative decision-making, with continuous re-evaluation;
21. *Requests* all parliaments to urge their governments to adopt measures to effectively enable them to honour the undertaking made by all the United Nations Member States in the Millennium Declaration, and to work jointly to establish more egalitarian processes in which all citizens in every country can participate;
22. *Also requests* all countries to make a firm pledge to human development and take all appropriate measures to increase current social expenditure allocated in their budgets for human development;
23. *Calls on* the parliaments of the developed countries to work towards the goal of earmarking at least 0.7 per cent of GNP as Official Development Assistance for global human development;
24. *Further calls on* all parliaments and parliamentarians to enact not only measures that focus on facilitating economic growth, but more particularly those that empower people and promote their welfare and development;
25. ***Endorses the Brussels Declaration, and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 55/279 of 12 July 2001, and emphasises, in particular, the need for the effective implementation of Commitment 2 of the Programme relating to good governance at the national and international levels, and of Commitment 7 relating to necessary implementation of the Programme at the national level;***
26. ***Requests the IPU to devote special attention to the LDCs in its programmes and activities focusing on the areas of good governance at the national and international levels, and also requests parliaments to play a supportive role in ensuring the effective implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action at the national level;***
27. *Strongly endorses* the resolution adopted by the IPU Council at its 168th session on 7 April 2001, expressing support for volunteerism and encouraging closer cooperation between the IPU and the United Nations Volunteers in this regard.