

15 April 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening Session of the 124th Inter-Parliamentary Union
Assembly**

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for your invitation to participate in the opening ceremony of this year's Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is an excellent opportunity to pursue our effort to bring closer together the highest democratic and representative fora that are national Parliaments and the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The 2005 World Summit outcome document called for – I quote – “a strengthened cooperation between the UN and national and regional Parliaments, in particular through the IPU, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of the work of the UN and ensuring the effective implementation of UN reform” – end of quote.

The collaboration between the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations over the last couple of years has indeed demonstrated the significant contribution of Parliaments to making international relations and decision-making more transparent, more accountable and more effective.

As a former member of the Swiss Parliament and now as President of the UN General Assembly, I am well aware of the role and significance of Parliaments. I know how demanding it is to be a Parliamentarian. I thus pay tribute to your dedication to the interests of your peoples and to the missions and activities of the United Nations.

I particularly appreciate the strong commitment of Parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Millennium Development Goals, which is one of the priorities on the agenda of the 65th session of the General Assembly. In his statement at the MDG Summit last September, your Secretary-General made a call for Parliaments to ensure that the development goals are taken into account in their daily work and translated into national programs and laws. This is highly relevant. Parliaments are also key to ensuring that resources are made available for financing development cooperation activities, and that governments honor their ODA commitments.

I am also pleased to note that you will have a panel discussion on ensuring equity for children while achieving the MDGs. Many other crucial issues are on the agenda of your 124th Assembly, issues that

concern us all and which the United Nations and the General Assembly are also addressing. This further demonstrates, if still needed, the importance of our cooperation.

The overall theme of your general debate is about parliamentary accountability. Bridging the democracy deficit is indeed of a very topical subject, both at the national and at the global level. I will focus my address today on the role of the United Nations in global governance. It is the topic that I proposed for the general debate of the UN General Assembly in September last year.

I am satisfied that the topic resonated well with Member States: it was mentioned by many Heads of State and Government in their statements during the general debate, but, in addition, about 100 Member States sponsored a resolution on the United Nations and global governance, which was adopted by consensus last December and will allow our work on the issue to continue beyond this year.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the world is in pressing need of a better global governance system that is more effective, inclusive and representative.

The world is indeed getting more interconnected and interdependent. The progress in transportation, telecommunication and information technologies, the increase in movement of people, as well as the rapid liberalization of flows of capital, goods and services – this has to be underlined - bring great benefits and new opportunities. But, at the same time, we are increasingly facing challenges that cannot be solved by countries acting in isolation. The economic and financial crisis that started in the United States in 2008 and rapidly spread to the rest of the world is one such example. The earthquake and the tsunami that hit Japan a few weeks ago and the ensuing risk of a nuclear catastrophe is another tragic illustration. This is true for many other issues, like migration and pandemics, like global terrorism and cybercrime.

Global challenges have to be addressed through global decision-making and global action, that is through global governance. Let me clarify what I mean by global governance. First, global governance is the way of organizing decision-making in a Westphalian world of sovereign entities with their national parliaments. Global governance is not the same thing as global government. We are not heading towards establishing a world government. Second, global governance has to be based on the principle of subsidiarity. Problems that can be addressed at the local or national level should be addressed at this level respectively by the competent institutions. This is a rule that has long been applied by federalist states.

At the same time, a shift in political and economic power is taking place in the world. New markets are emerging. This has been made even clearer by the recent economic and financial crisis, during which emerging markets proved more resilient than more mature economies. South-South trade and investment flows, as well as South-South cooperation, are growing at an impressive pace. These economic trends have to be better reflected in the global governance system.

Traditional multilateral institutions, like the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions, are increasingly criticized for not being efficient and representative enough.

As a response, new actors, like the G20 and other ad hoc informal groups have emerged. The economic and financial crisis has highlighted the importance of a rapid and coordinated response, which the G20 has effectively delivered. The global governance landscape is therefore becoming more fragmented and more complex and there is a risk for the UN to be marginalized.

While we have to acknowledge that these smaller groupings can indeed act in an efficient manner, their inclusiveness and legitimacy on the other hand is questionable. We have to find the best possible articulation between expertise, leadership and legitimacy, and all this has to be coherent.

I am convinced that the United Nations and its General Assembly have a central role to play to capture the complexity of this new world and to shape a global governance structure that is efficient, open and representative.

The UN has important comparative advantages. With its 192 Member States, the UN is a near universal body and enjoys unique legitimacy. It is a Charter-based organization, with purposes and principles, membership and organs, and a budget that are clearly defined. Therefore the UN offers a stable institutional framework to its Member States. This contrasts with the ‘summit-based’ and ‘issue-based’ nature of the G groupings, and the discretion and arbitrariness that drive their membership and functioning. Any matter within the scope of the Charter may be discussed at the General Assembly. The UN is here to promote the rights of every woman and man on our planet. With its system of one country, one vote, it ensures that even the smallest voices are heard.

But for the UN to play its central role in global governance, there are two important requisites.

First, a strong United Nations requires a decisive effort to be more effective and more representative, to revitalize the General Assembly, to reform the Security Council and review the work of the Human Rights Council. The economic bodies of the United Nations, I think here mainly of the ECOSOC, must also be strengthened.

Yet, the pace of progress and the success of these reforms do not depend on me. While, as President of the General Assembly, I can create the conditions conducive to progress, it is up to the Member States to find the common ground and forge the consensus. As Parliamentarians, you can play an important role to keep these issues on the political agenda, to press your governments to progress and hold them accountable.

Second, the UN cannot do it all by itself. While making the best of its comparative advantages, the UN has to build bridges with the other actors of the global governance system with the view of complementing them and being inclusive.

We therefore have to find the appropriate mechanisms for communication, consultation and cooperation between the UN and these other actors of governance.

As regards the rapprochement of the G20 to the UN, I organized informal discussions of the General Assembly before and after the G20 Summit in Seoul to give all Member States the opportunity to

express their views, regardless whether or not they were invited to participate in the Seoul meeting. I am pleased that the building of bridges between the United Nations and the G20 is continuing this year with the French Presidency of the Group. We already had informal meetings with the French Minister for Agriculture on the priorities of the French Presidency for the G20 on food security and commodity prices. Since the G20 Summit in Cannes is still many months ahead of us, there will be other opportunities for substantive interaction between the United Nations and the G20 in order for all the Member States to give their views on the agenda of the Summit. To raise the accountability and legitimacy of the G20, it will be important to have a post G20 Summit based on the model of the one we had after the Seoul Summit.

To stay in touch with the realities of the world and to better connect with the peoples that the United Nations was set up to serve – we must indeed never forget that the preamble of the Charter opens with “We the Peoples” – these mechanisms for communication, consultation, and cooperation have to encompass representatives from civil society, the private sector, academic bodies and think tanks, as well as national and regional Parliaments.

Let me mention in this respect that we just had a civil society hearing, as a contribution to the preparation of the HIV/AIDS High-level review that will take place in June in New York. This was a very timely and productive hearing, just before the start of the intergovernmental consultations.

As elected representatives, with political responsibilities at the national level, you, Parliamentarians, are in a unique position to respect the aspiration of your peoples, be accountable to them, and convey these aspiration to your governments and to the UN. You can press your governments to act and to hold them accountable for the decisions taken.

I welcome the adoption, in December last year, of a resolution on the cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, deciding to include an item dedicated to the interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the agenda of the 66th session. This will allow exploring more concrete ways to strengthen the links between our institutions.

The Joint Parliamentary Hearing, which is organized by the President of the IPU and by the President of the General Assembly, is one such important instrument. I am pleased to stress that we had, in New York, on 2 December last year, a very meaningful exchange of views on development, the economic recovery and economic global governance.

Making sure that Parliamentarians are fully informed of UN activities is also essential to enable you to react in a timely fashion. You also have a key role in raising public awareness about issues discussed at the United Nations; this can be done by scheduling debates on these topics in national Parliaments.

Many questions are still open as regards the architecture and the functioning of the global governance system at the beginning of the 21st century. To use an expression dear to my friend Pascal Lamy, the system must yet emerge from its current “gaseous” state. Some features are given. It has to be open and representative and build on three poles – expertise, leadership and legitimacy. But the entities

belonging to each pole and the relations among them are still to be worked out. Yet, as I said from the outset, I am convinced that legitimacy mainly lies with the United Nations. With a strong General Assembly, the UN should be the main forum for the global debate, debate in which Parliaments and the IPU provide a very valuable contribution to bridging the democracy gap.

I will organize a thematic debate on global governance in New York on 28 June. This will be an opportunity to further reflect on the issue.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a very interesting and stimulating Assembly.