



3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT

United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010



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DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE

Securing global democratic accountability for the common good

(1) Accountability and representation lie at the heart of democracy. Parliament is the central institution of any democracy through which the will of the people is expressed, laws are passed and government is held to account. We, the Speakers of the world's parliaments, have convened at the United Nations in Geneva to discuss how our parliaments can help secure democratic accountability worldwide for the common good.

(2) Since our last summit in 2005, the world has undergone complex and profound changes. We are living in an increasingly multi-polar world characterized by deepening economic globalization coupled with radical changes in international economic relations and the balance of power. We also see greater support for multilateralism and the promotion of democracy in international relations.

(3) Since 2005, economic growth and development have been stymied by a global financial and economic crisis. Although it might seem that the global economy today shows signs of recovery, the economic foundations remain weak with deep-rooted structural problems that have not yet been addressed. Several States have seen their public deficits worsen following interventions in the banking and financial sector. The global development gap is still widening. The economic crisis is compounded by challenges relating to climate change, food and energy security, trafficking in persons, migration and public health, the solutions to which still elude us. Devastating natural disasters have

become more prevalent and non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons, drugs trafficking, piracy and other forms of organized crime have increased substantially.

(4) Terrorism, by undermining peace, democracy and stability, continues to be one of the most serious threats faced by all humankind. We have an important responsibility to facilitate our governments' efforts to combat terrorism by implementing all relevant UN resolutions and international conventions and agreements. We encourage States to show solidarity and take collective global action against terrorism by adopting, sooner rather than later, a comprehensive convention against all forms of terrorism.

(5) We are more than ever convinced that only by working together can we address these and other global challenges successfully and make a better world for all people. While we may differ on matters of policy and action, we are unanimous in our belief that all countries, large and small, rich and poor, need to work together, seeking solutions, including through multilateral channels, with the United Nations, which guarantees the sovereign equality of States, at the centre. We reaffirm the commitment of our parliaments to engage fully in support of this effort.

A. Parliaments and democracy

(6) Our parliaments are national institutions, marked by the history and cultural heritage of each of our countries.

We are proud of our sovereign independence which it is our right, duty and wish to defend.

(7) We recognize that democratization is a continuing process for all parliaments and that it is necessary to promote sound democratic practices within our parliaments, whether they are recently established or have been in existence for centuries. We are committed to assisting each other in this effort, with the stronger institutions providing assistance to the weaker ones, with increased sharing of good practices for the greater benefit of all, and with a constant concern for the fuller participation of our citizens in national and global governance in the interests of the common good.

(8) As a collegiate body of the world's parliaments, we rely on the collective experience and wisdom of our members. Together we pledge to make our parliaments more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, enabling the diverse components of society to participate in politics. We will also promote standards of integrity for parliaments and their members, recognizing that membership of parliament is first and foremost a public service, and will uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in public life.

(9) Democracy is founded on the rule of law and respect for human rights, which are based on the precept that nothing must infringe upon human dignity. We reaffirm the need to ensure the equal rights and opportunities of men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. We pledge to help promote a climate of tolerance and to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different, which also implies protecting the rights of persons belonging to minority and indigenous groups.

(10) We emphatically state that the proportion of women in parliament today is not sufficient and we pledge to redouble our efforts to reach, as a global average, the internationally agreed target of thirty per cent of women in parliaments by 2015. We

undertake to combat all forms of discrimination against women which prevent them from realizing their aspirations to greater involvement in public life.

(11) We emphasize the importance of encouraging our youth to invest their energy, enthusiasm and creativity in the advancement of our societies and the promotion of mutual understanding. We urge our parliaments to address the concerns and aspirations of youth and encourage the participation of young people in public life.

(12) We are preoccupied by a widely held perception of politics as a closed space where there is little room for opposing opinions and consideration of alternative policies. We will do all we can to ensure that the rights of all members of parliament are guaranteed; they must be free to speak out without fear of harassment or punishment, even when they do not toe the party line. Equally, we are committed to fostering political tolerance among citizens and political leaders through education and communication.

(13) Defending our parliaments also means that we will be outspoken in our condemnation when parliaments are dissolved in breach of the national constitution or when members of parliament are arbitrarily deprived of their mandate or otherwise have their human rights violated. We have seen a number of instances of this in recent times. We condemn the usurpation of political power by force and the persecution of elected representatives of the people.

B. Parliaments on the international stage

(14) We believe that, in all likelihood, the world will continue to be confronted by crises that will pose tremendous challenges to the prevailing order. Such crises, however, if they are managed democratically, can provide a springboard for vital and regenerative change.

(15) We are concerned that this is not generally the case at present. The democracy gap persists. Many would say it is widening.

Those who have never had a voice in domestic or global affairs remain marginalized or excluded altogether.

(16) While the recent convulsions that began with a financial crisis are diminishing, millions continue to suffer from the aftershocks. For untold numbers of people, especially in the developing countries, the challenges of daily survival have worsened. The suffering will endure and, if nothing is done, go largely ignored or unnoticed. We remain convinced that one vital way to bridge the growing gap between those who have the means to live comfortable lives and those who are wholly dispossessed is to make multilateral institutions more democratic and representative, and establish more participatory practices at the international level.

(17) The time has come for an imaginative leap of faith. Today's multilateral systems should allow for much greater consideration for the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of people everywhere whose voices go unheard.

(18) We therefore call once again for greater parliamentary involvement in international cooperation and we reiterate the recommendations we have made at our past two conferences. We emphasize that our parliaments must be more active in international affairs by contributing to and monitoring international negotiations, by overseeing the enforcement of agreements that have been reached by governments and, more generally, by ensuring national compliance with international norms and the rule of law.

(19) Building political will and public support and ensuring national ownership and effective implementation of international agreements can only come about if parliaments and their members are well informed and actively engaged, both nationally and internationally, throughout the consultation and negotiating process. We are committed to strengthening our capacity to assume this role, without prejudice to the separation of powers, and we call on our

governments to work with us to this effect. Wherever possible, we intend to ensure that parliamentarians are included in national delegations to major United Nations meetings and multilateral negotiating fora.

(20) Our involvement in international cooperation must be firmly rooted in the daily work of our parliaments, much of which relates to ensuring accountability. It is therefore essential that our parliaments play an important role in overseeing the implementation of governmental programs to address major challenges, such as poverty, access to water, climate change, food and energy security.

(21) We acknowledge the growing significance of regional and sub-regional parliaments and their contribution to international cooperation. We reiterate our earlier calls on the IPU to cooperate more closely with these institutions with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and interregional parliamentary cooperation.

C. The United Nations

(22) The United Nations is the most universal, representative and authoritative international organization of sovereign States and it plays an irreplaceable role in international affairs. We pledge our support to the Organization and will continue to extend our cooperation in keeping with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

(23) We take note of the reforms undertaken so far by the United Nations. It has established new bodies that are beginning to prove their worth, and is working to bring more logical coherence to its operations at the country level. There is, however, need for further reform to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness by making it more democratic and representative. We encourage the United Nations to continue this exercise, particularly by revitalizing the UN General Assembly and reforming the Security Council to take account of today's realities. We also believe that Member States have to invest more in development, global peace and

security, and human rights, and in integrating gender equality into all UN programs and activities.

(24) We support the tireless efforts by the United Nations in pursuit of world peace and security. We applaud the renewed focus on preventive diplomacy and peace-building, and remain firmly convinced that democratic, strong and effective parliaments are vital to sustainable peace. We commend the United Nations Secretary-General for his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal, and pledge to pursue efforts towards a nuclear-weapon-free world.

(25) We commend the United Nations for enshrining the world's development objectives in the Millennium Development Goals. We endorse these goals and the 21 targets into which they are translated. Much has been done to meet these targets, but if current trends persist, an alarming number of them may not be met. Governments, and in particular those from the industrialized countries, must honour the pledges they have made to fund these efforts notwithstanding the difficulties engendered by the financial and economic crisis.

(26) In this, as in so many other areas, we all stand to gain from building a closer and more powerful relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. The Millennium Development Goals will not be met without a strong sense of accountability accompanying all efforts. Democracy, security, development, human rights and gender equality are inextricably linked. Our parliaments can do more to ensure that development goals are taken into account in our daily work and translated into national programs and laws. Likewise, we encourage our parliaments, when they examine draft budgets and bills, to assess their impact on the fulfillment of the Goals. We pledge to support these efforts, monitor progress closely and do our part in meeting the targets by 2015.

(27) We recognize that much has already been achieved by the United Nations. Looking back to our first summit in 2000, we

see ten years of encouraging progress. Our parliaments have gained from an awakening within the United Nations to our crucial role in providing the legislative foundations for development and in strengthening the rule of law which is essential to development. Recent summit outcomes have acknowledged this, particularly in the area of development aid. The United Nations has also started to realize the need to support fragile parliaments as it sets out to rebuild states emerging from conflicts. The United Nations has also shown a new interest in keeping parliaments duly informed of their agenda and activities.

(28) Yet much more needs to be done and we look to the Inter-Parliamentary Union to help forge a closer and more effective working relationship between the United Nations and our parliaments.

D. The Inter-Parliamentary Union

(29) We take pride in the IPU and its many accomplishments stretching over three centuries. Our predecessors who founded the Organization over one hundred and twenty years ago and their successors have helped lay a solid foundation for international political cooperation and multilateralism.

(30) Today, the IPU is the world organization of parliaments. It facilitates political debate, dialogue and cooperation within and between parliaments. It promotes and defends democracy. It develops standards, disseminates good practices and provides concrete support in constructing democratic parliaments. It builds capacity in our parliaments in support of peace, security and development. It defends the human rights of members of parliament and promotes respect for universal human rights norms and principles. It works in support of gender equality and women's participation in political and public life. It assists our parliaments in coping with a growing international agenda and in developing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations.

(31) We invite the IPU to strengthen and rationalize its programs in support of our parliaments and to facilitate cooperation projects among parliaments. We view the Organization as a center of excellence in relation to parliaments and democracy and we wish to see the IPU developing this work further. The IPU can also do more to assist our parliaments in addressing the Millennium Development Goals and in coping with some of today's foremost global challenges.

(32) We affirm that the IPU is the international body best suited to help build the relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. As an Observer to the United Nations since 2002, the IPU has played this role to increasing effect. We encourage the IPU and the United Nations to expand their cooperation and set it on a firmer footing.

(33) In keeping with the recommendations of the first two Speakers' Conferences to bridge the democracy deficit in international relations, we also encourage the IPU to promote greater accountability and

transparency of the Bretton Woods institutions. The IPU can do this by facilitating more direct interaction between parliaments and the Bretton Woods Institutions, and by helping to strengthen the capacities of parliaments to exercise their role in the budget process and economic decision-making in general.

(34) We welcome the discussion which has been started within the IPU in order to strengthen its functions, promote its efficiency and develop its cooperation with the United Nations and its institutions.

(35) We conclude our deliberations with a sense of cautious optimism. The world is facing multiple crises on an unprecedented scale. As never before, however, there is a shared understanding that we can only address these challenges by working together and we, who have a popular mandate to represent the people, will not be found wanting. We, in our parliaments, can and will do our part in securing global democratic accountability for the common good of humankind.