



**CONFERENCE OF PRESIDING OFFICERS
OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS**
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*Organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union
in cooperation with the United Nations*



The parliamentary vision for international cooperation at the dawn of the third millennium

Declaration adopted by consensus

We, Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments, are meeting at the United Nations in New York on the eve of the Millennium Assembly to pledge our commitment to international cooperation, with a stronger United Nations at its core. We resolve to ensure that our parliaments contribute more substantively to this cooperation by making the voice of the peoples heard, thereby introducing a more manifestly democratic dimension into international decision-making and cooperation. To help impart fresh momentum to the United Nations, parliaments must be more closely associated with its work so as to give real meaning to the opening words of the United Nations Charter: "*We, the peoples of the United Nations*".

Main challenges at the dawn of the third millennium

As we enter the new millennium, we must pursue together the ideals enshrined in the Charter and work to address the main challenges facing the world community: the achievement of international peace and security, democracy, respect for human rights, sustainable development and the ensuing social progress.

We reaffirm the principles of the *Universal Declaration on Democracy* adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and pledge to work towards the establishment of a culture of democracy. An elected parliament that represents all components of society and has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by adopting legislation and by continuously overseeing the action of the government is indispensable for guaranteeing the people's rights and liberties and securing civil peace and harmonious development.

Democracy is founded on the rule of law and on respect for human rights, which are themselves 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 also reaffirm the need to promote a climate of tolerance and to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different, which implies protecting the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The principle according to which no one is above the law and all are equal before it must also hold true for relations between sovereign States, which are equal in terms of rights and whose peoples have the right to self-determination and to choose their political system freely and democratically.

We reaffirm our determination to see to it that our States honour their commitments under the United Nations Charter. States must ensure that their conduct conforms to international law, especially human rights and international humanitarian law. Respect for the instruments

of international humanitarian law is essential and we will continue to work for the establishment of an International Criminal Court that is non-discriminatory and universal.

We reiterate our commitment to general and complete disarmament under effective international control, in particular nuclear disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons, and of "smart" weapons and anti-personnel mines. We remain equally committed to cooperation in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime.

Peace based on solid and sincere foundations requires a more just world, and we firmly believe that all future action must seek to ensure sustainable economic and social development that is people-centred. We must work to create national and international conditions conducive to social development, social integration, the eradication of poverty and the reduction of unemployment.

Preserving and making the best use of the environment are essential prerequisites for sustainable development. Accordingly, we must not meet our own needs at the expense of future generations. In conformity with the conclusions of the Earth Summit, the world must pay particular attention to water, energy and transport issues, to ways of integrating environmental costs and benefits into business, and to the impact of the state of the environment on the overall economy .

Globalisation is creating a new situation. Increased trade, new technology, growing foreign investment and expanding information-sharing are fuelling economic growth and human progress. However, these developments have benefited the developed nations more than developing countries and the latter are experiencing serious problems in implementing international trade agreements. There is a need to ensure that the opportunities and benefits of globalisation are shared more widely and that the right to development is respected. Here, the World Trade Organization must seek to ensure both free and fair trade producing long-term sustainable benefits.

In the poorest countries of the world, debt is a major constraint and a very real impediment to development. We urge the international community to seize the momentum generated by the transition to a new millennium to reduce substantially the debt of these countries and to cancel the public debt of the heavily indebted poor countries. These measures should be carried out in such a way as to avoid shifting the burden to other developing countries. Debtor countries must, for their part, introduce transparent mechanisms of control in order to ensure that the benefits of debt relief result in the socio-economic development of their peoples. We also call for greater efforts to reverse the decline in official development assistance.

The United Nations in the twenty-first century

We reaffirm our adherence to the purposes and principles set out in the UN Charter and in the international instruments adopted since the founding of the world body. We are convinced that the UN is needed more than ever before and must remain the cornerstone of strong and effective global cooperation. We rededicate ourselves to strengthening the world organisation and urge members to provide it with the necessary human and financial resources.

There is a need to continue and complete the United Nations reform process. The reforms

must be based on strict adherence to the principles of democracy and respect for the sovereign equality of all UN member States. We commit ourselves to work towards that end. We must also work to ensure that the United Nations is the primary forum for the debate on development assistance.

The evolution of international relations

There has been a momentous evolution in international relations, which are no longer limited to traditional diplomacy. The development of multilateral cooperation, whose field of action continues to grow, has added new features to international relations. International cooperation henceforth requires different working methods and the participation of new actors. In particular, action to honour the commitments assumed in international and regional forums, which are now more important than ever, demands the involvement of parliaments, and many issues addressed by parliaments at the national level have an international dimension.

These new approaches are all the more necessary in the light of the far-reaching global changes that have occurred in recent years. We are witnessing a technological revolution of unprecedented dimensions. Extraordinary progress in communications makes it possible today to follow events instantaneously around the globe. Today's world is increasingly described as a global village to signify a smaller world and one that is dramatically more interdependent than ever before. Economic activities of all sorts, at home and abroad, by national and transnational companies, investment, trade and cross-border flows of capital tie the world's nations closer together, as does the growing realisation that the world's resources are finite.

The increasing complexity and globalisation of developments in the political, economic, social, environmental and cultural fields require parliaments and their members, more than ever before, to play their role in enabling citizens and society as a whole to understand and cope with the interconnections between globalisation and their daily lives and to translate their concerns into national and international policy. Otherwise, international cooperation and decision-making might eventually be seen as posing a threat to national or local interests and even democracy.

Globalisation and the pre-eminence of economic factors in the development of nations make it imperative to strengthen political processes and the link between citizens and their representatives. Under these circumstances, it is also crucial to reinforce the role of parliament and its members as intermediaries between a complex international decision-making process and citizens.

The parliamentary dimension of international cooperation

We call upon all parliaments and their world organisation - the Inter-Parliamentary Union - to provide a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation. Parliament is made up of men and women elected by the people to represent them and express their aspirations. It is the organ of State that allows society in all its diversity to participate in the political process. Parliaments embody the sovereignty of the people and can, in all legitimacy, contribute to expressing the will of the State internationally.

To provide the parliamentary dimension, parliaments and their members must assume increased responsibility in international relations, play a more active role at the national,

regional and global levels, and generally reinforce parliamentary diplomacy.

The parliamentary dimension must be provided by parliaments themselves first of all at the national level in four distinct but interconnected ways:

- (i) Influencing their respective countries' policy on matters dealt with in the United Nations and other international negotiating forums;
- (ii) Keeping themselves informed of the progress and outcome of these negotiations;
- (iii) Deciding on ratification, where the Constitution so foresees, of texts and treaties signed by governments; and
- (iv) Contributing actively to the subsequent implementation process.

To achieve this objective, we undertake to review within our respective parliaments how best to make use of current parliamentary procedures so that parliament, with an active input by all parties and members, can make an appropriate contribution to governmental negotiations at the international level. Information-gathering should be reinforced to enable parliament to keep abreast of developments on international issues. Parliaments should also play a more proactive role in processes relating to the ratification of and compliance with international agreements. Throughout, parliament has a particular responsibility to engage the public in a continuous dialogue and facilitate its input into the decision-making process.

At the regional level, parliaments should make the best possible use of regional inter-parliamentary organisations and through them seek to influence the corresponding intergovernmental bodies. Parliaments should examine closely the work of such organisations in order to increase their efficiency and avoid duplication. They should also exchange experiences with a view to improving and simplifying national legislation.

At the international level, concurrently with the reinforcement of the political input of national parliaments into the process of inter-State cooperation, the Inter-Parliamentary Union should be consolidated as a world organisation for inter-parliamentary cooperation and for relaying the vision and will of its members to intergovernmental organisations.

Thus, we hereby solemnly confirm our support for the Inter-Parliamentary Union and our determination to participate in its work with renewed vigour, thus giving the IPU the means to discharge to the full the mission entrusted to it. In this process we also call upon the IPU to undertake such statutory and structural reforms as may be required to strengthen the organisation and its institutional links with parliaments.

By implementing this declaration, we propose to contribute substantively to international cooperation and to make the voice of the peoples heard within the United Nations, thereby pursuing the lofty ideals enshrined in the Charter and meeting the challenges facing the world community in terms of achieving peace, democracy, sustainable development and social progress.

We decide to convey this document to our parliaments, as appropriate, and to urge them to do everything possible to ensure that it is followed up in a practical and effective manner. We also request our governments to bring this declaration to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly for debate. Finally, we call upon the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to seek ways of strengthening their institutional links and practical cooperation.

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