

Address to the Millennium Summit on behalf of the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments

Dr. Najma Heptulla, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha and President of IPU, September 8, 2000

Mr. and Madam Co-Presidents of the Millennium Summit,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished delegates,

I am honored to take the floor as the President of the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments and on behalf of the oldest international organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union to present to you the outcome of an unique and historically compelling event held in this hall from 30 August to 1 September in cooperation with the United Nations, with the participation of some 150 Presidents of Chambers from 140 countries. This first ever Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments, truly represents the commitment of representatives of the peoples, the Parliaments, to work ever more closely together with the United Nations to ensure that the twenty first century is a century without fear, without deprivation and want, a century that allows for the fullest development of the inherent potential of each and every human being. That will represent the real globalisation.

Mr. Secretary-General, we thank you for your very inspiring address on that occasion. Your messages will be reciprocated through our actions.

After intensive debate, we unanimously adopted a Declaration encapsulating our parliamentary vision for international cooperation at the dawn of the third millennium.

It sets out the main challenges facing our societies and expresses our political resolve to successfully overcome them, through international cooperation. It also contains recommendations on the role of parliaments in a reformed multilateral cooperation system.

Mr. President,

Parliaments stand firmly behind the United Nations and this support is both political and practical. Whether we belong to the majority or the opposition in our parliaments, we are committed to offering the necessary political backing to the UN as the cornerstone of the international cooperation system. We are also committed to allocating the resources which the United Nations and the other intergovernmental institutions need to accomplish their noble mission.

We are unanimous in identifying a democratic deficit in the United Nations and the intergovernmental regime at large. If UN decisions are to interpret the concerns and aspirations of the peoples and if international agreements are to effectively find their way to our national reality, parliament, as the institution which legitimately represents society in its diversity and is accountable to it, should have a better say in the international cooperation process.

No doubt it is for you, governments, to negotiate at the UN. Surely, our main role as legislators is to translate into legislative and budgetary provisions the agreements reached internationally by you. Yet it is in the wider interest of all, and certainly in the interest of democracy, that we be involved in the process in its early stages and not exclusively in the implementation phase. Intergovernmental organisations would also become more accountable and would be perceived as more transparent by the people if we were better informed about and associated with their action as people's representatives. We are happy to note that the Millennium Declaration that this august gathering would adopt, calls for a strengthening of cooperation between the United Nations and the national parliaments, through their world organization, the Inter- Parliamentary Union, that I have the honour to represent before you. I and my colleagues would do all that is in our power, and attempt much that is beyond, to give concrete shape to your call.

We are determined to see to it that the necessary work is done at the national level and especially within our national parliaments so that action can be taken to develop the parliamentary dimension of the international cooperation for which we are calling. To create this new partnership, parliaments intend to act in close consultation with you, governments and with the intergovernmental organisations.

Internationally, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is a unique instrument to relay the views of our parliaments to the intergovernmental system. This is why we can no longer accept that it be classified as a non-governmental organization and we look forward to identifying with you a status for the IPU which is commensurate with the constitutional status of parliaments and with IPU's mission as our world organisation.

Mr. President,

We were concerned that two of our fellow Presiding officers were prevented to participate. The denial of visas to them runs counter to the spirit on which the IPU and the UN are founded and is contrary to the principles of democracy underlying the functioning of parliaments. Furthermore, it calls into question our ability to meet at the UN in New York to express the kind of support with which we want to provide it. I therefore call on you all and the host country urgently to help us find a solution to such problems