



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. Chairman,

For the IPU and its 141 member parliaments, arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation are all matters of great concern. As such, they figure high on the overall agenda of the Organization, with at least five related resolutions adopted at IPU Statutory Assemblies, as well as two sessions of the Annual Parliamentary Hearings at the United Nations devoted to these issues over the past three years.

The IPU was created more than a century ago first foremost to promote dialogue and build confidence among parliamentarians from all corners of the world, in order to prevent or diffuse conflicts. Multilateralism is thus deeply ingrained in our way of looking at the world and the challenges it faces. We believe that through dialogue it is possible to move from a culture of violent response to one of mutual understanding and cooperation. As the closest link between the people of the world and their respective governments, parliaments have a unique perspective to bring to bear on all issues of the international agenda, but also unique responsibilities to ensure that international law is applied within national borders and that commitments taken abroad are duly implemented and translated into action at the national level.

As parliaments are called upon to ratify international treaties, and through their oversight function make sure that these are effectively implemented, it is of crucial importance that parliaments themselves are well informed of and involved in the deliberative and negotiating process under way. Only then can it be expected that parliaments will actively pursue the ratification of international instruments, their early entry into force and translation into national legislation.

From our perspective, there is growing political awareness and commitment to this process, as formulated by the Speakers of Parliaments when they assembled recently in New York, for their Second World Conference. On that occasion, they made a strong call for global security issues to be tackled more vigorously at the United Nations. Nuclear-weapon states should meet their obligations in the field of nuclear disarmament, and States must make new efforts in all areas of non-proliferation and arms control. In turn, parliaments should monitor more closely the national implementation of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament instruments and related United Nations resolutions, and engage in an exchange of information on best practices for such monitoring.

On the question of nuclear weapons, the IPU is convinced that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the best possible bargain to eliminate the threat of nuclear attacks once and for all. We are concerned with the breakdown of talks on the NPT and urge all parties to come back to the negotiating table with a renewed sense of responsibility. Our members are also supportive of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and call for its early entry into force.

In order to diffuse tensions at the regional level, IPU members have urged the further development of nuclear-weapon-free-zones, including in the Middle East. With respect to biological weapons, our members have recognized the need to strengthen the Convention on Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons (BTWC) by establishing a legally binding mechanism for its verification.

In the field of small arms and light weapons, which are responsible for at least half a million deaths every year, the IPU is seeking to give political impetus to the Program of Action with a debate scheduled at the 114th Statutory Assembly of the IPU, to be held in Nairobi in May 2006. The IPU draft report and resolution for that meeting will include the input received this summer from the various UN debates, such as the Biennial Meeting of States in early July, and will take into consideration the main elements resulting from consultations with the UN Secretariat, UNICEF, the ICRC and other organizations.

Among other things, the report acknowledges the adoption this spring by the UN Open-ended Working Group of an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and urges parliaments to translate the provisions of this new international agreement into national legislation and regulations. The report also urges concerned parliaments to expand existing buy-back programs that provide cash to ex-combatants for their weapons and develop programs that assist ex-combatants with their overall efforts to return to civilian life.

The IPU is also encouraging parliaments to adopt appropriate national legislation to control the export of armaments of all types, most particularly focusing on items relating to weapons of mass destruction. This is part of a broader process seeking to enhance the democratic oversight of the security sector, including through a series of handbooks and guides, as well as through national and regional workshops and seminars.

Mr. Chairman,

Terrorism constitutes perhaps one of the most tangible threats to the security of many nations today as well as, potentially, a major destabilizing force within the international order. The prospect of WMDs falling in the hands of terrorists may turn into reality if we don't act urgently to close legal loopholes and take concrete regulatory and law enforcement action on the ground.

A resolution adopted this spring in Manila, at the 112th IPU Assembly, calls on those parliaments that have not yet ratified the 12 multilateral treaties on terrorism and the relevant regional instruments to do so expeditiously, and to proceed from there to incorporate the provisions of those treaties into domestic legislation. After the agreement reached this year on a Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, the IPU looks forward to seeing negotiations on the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism come to a successful conclusion this fall, pursuant to the commitment made in the 2005 World Summit outcome document.

Like many of you in this room, our members are hopeful that a decision to call an international conference for combating terrorism will be taken during this session of the General Assembly. They also share the view of many UN member states that a precise definition of the nature and actual features of terrorism is indeed required. In this process, we are hopeful that the experience of IPU in conducting intense political consultations and identifying key elements of a definition of terrorism will be of assistance to the United Nations member States.

Mr. Chairman,

As important as they are, international covenants do not represent an end in itself. To make peace or to keep the peace after the cessation of hostilities we need a more comprehensive assistance package for countries emerging from conflict, which includes training, monitoring, infrastructure, and capacity building for governance. That is why we consider one of the greatest achievements of this year's World Summit to be the constitution of a UN Peace-building Commission. Parliaments play a key role in this transition process, and serve as an important barometer of how healthy and sustainable post-conflict order really is. It is from this perspective that one of the up-coming sessions of the 2005 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations – to be held here at the end of the month - will be devoted to the mandate and working modalities of the future Peace-Building Commission.

The IPU annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations is an event that is attracting more and more interest from the international parliamentary community, as it provides an important opportunity for discussion and interaction on the main issues of the United Nations agenda, and we hope that many of you will be able to join us on this occasion.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by recalling the action of IPU as a strong advocate of gender parity in politics and decision-making not only as a fundamental human right, but also as an effective way to bring about development and peace. We believe that women can bring a unique perspective on all these issues and can make a decisive difference to their overall outcome. For the IPU, then, it is more than ever urgent to ensure that more women be included in all organizations and forums promoting disarmament and arms control. We look forward to the October 27th open debate in the Security Council on women and the promotion of peace as a significant opportunity to further mainstream this dimension into the work of the United Nations.

Thank you.