



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEBATE ON
“PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS”**

**IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE
COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

23 JANUARY 2006

Mr President, Mr Secretary-General, Distinguished Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which is so instrumental in championing the causes of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe and beyond. I commend you for the invaluable work that you have carried out during the last five decades in these important areas.

I have been invited to make some remarks as you debate “the Parliamentary dimension of the United Nations”. At the outset, I would like to thank you for your commitment to the ideals of the United Nations and to the efforts of better connecting the United Nations to the peoples it was set up to serve. We must never forget the fundamental purposes of the World Organization and that “We the Peoples” are the first three words of the Charter of the United Nations.

Today, the world is facing a test of international cooperation, a test of multilateralism. The need is greater than ever to find global solutions to global problems, such as poverty, communicable diseases, environmental threats, acts of terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime and armed conflicts. We must come together to meet these global challenges and strive to give the citizens of the world a safer and more prosperous life – a life in dignity for all.

Much is at stake – the alternatives to multilateralism are unilateralism or separate groups of countries facing each other. It is essential to make the United Nations a stronger and more effective actor on the world scene.

The United Nations is, however, not a universal medicine or universal cure. On its own, it cannot solve all the global problems at hand. It needs to build partnerships and enhance the engagement with other actors, on the global, regional and local levels. We should promote a strengthened role for regional organizations, in order to deal effectively with the international agenda, at headquarters but also out in the field. Let us recall that the basis for a close cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations was already laid down in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations.

At the 2005 World Summit in New York in September last year, our political leaders adopted an ambitious reform program for the United Nations in the areas of development, peace and collective security, human rights and the rule of law, as well as of strengthening of the United Nations. The World Summit Outcome document also reaffirmed the "support of a stronger relationship between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter". And it called for a "strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of the work of the United Nations and ensuring the effective implementation of United Nations reform."

The current, sixtieth session of the General Assembly has been devoted to the follow-up of the World Summit. Some progress and achievements have already been made, notably the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the improvement of humanitarian emergency funding in December last year. With the Peacebuilding Commission, we now have a mechanism for countries emerging from conflict, which will ensure that post-conflict recovery does not

mean post-engagement of the international community. With the new Central Emergency Response Fund, we will ensure a timely and effective international response to man-made or natural disasters, such as the horrific Asian tsunami and South Asian earthquake.

Currently, negotiations are underway to establish a Human Rights Council as well as a strengthened Economic and Social Council and to set the direction of the work on development in the United Nations. Other issues to be addressed in the next few months include a counter-terrorism strategy, management and secretariat reform and revitalization of the General Assembly.

On the subject of human rights, where the Council of Europe has made such great contributions, intense consultations and negotiations are now taking place in New York to set up a new Human Rights Council. Our work is building on the best practices of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Furthermore, elements are being considered that would make the Human Rights Council more effective in dealing with human rights violations and, at the same time, give the new body enhanced cooperative mechanisms.

The United Nations reform agenda is basically about making the United Nations more relevant to the peoples of the world. All of us working in the United Nations have to remember that our task is to deal with the real problems in the field and to make a difference for the peoples of the world. The United Nations must always stay in touch with the realities in the world and with the aspirations and dreams of the peoples of the world on the United Nations. As elected representatives, you parliamentarians have a unique position to channel the everyday hopes and concerns of your constituencies – and to act upon them.

Mr President,

This brings me to the subject of today's debate. First of all, I would like to thank Ms Tana de Zulueta for her excellent report and for her dedicated work to strengthening the parliamentary link to the United Nations. Let me briefly address some of the issues she has raised.

The report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations of 2004, the so called Cardoso-report, made the point that there is a democratic deficit in global governance. It was recommended that one important way to address this deficit would be to involve parliamentarians more closely in the activities of the United Nations. In broad terms, I agree with this proposition.

One major theme of the Cardoso-report is for the United Nations to become a more open and outward-looking organization and to hear the voices of different constituencies in debates of global significance. I find it essential that we find forms to enhance the United Nations interaction on such concrete issues both with parliamentarians and civil society including non-governmental organizations. It is my intention *inter alia* to hold a thematic debate in the General Assembly on a current issue of importance to the Member States and the peoples around the world later this spring. One main feature of this thematic debate will be to involve relevant outside partners.

In the draft resolution, you highlight several areas of work, where you as parliamentarians are the driving force, both here and as representatives of your national parliaments. Some of you may be represented in your national

delegations to the United Nations. By this, you have a strong position to exert influence to move your Governments in the desired direction on the proposals before you today.

The draft resolution proposes that parliamentarians should be fully informed of United Nations activities. I could not agree more. This relates to the forms of direct communication between Governments and their respective parliaments. We also need to find ways to enhance the exchange of information between the United Nations and parliamentary bodies, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe and, not least, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Another proposal is that parliamentarians should assume an active role in ensuring the implementation of United Nations decisions by Member States. Apart from exercising your legislative responsibilities, you can play an important role in spreading public awareness about these decisions. This can be achieved by encouraging debates on issues discussed at the United Nations in national parliaments as well as in regional parliamentary assemblies.

Here, I would like to highlight the Millennium Development Goals as one area in which parliamentarians around the world can make a significant contribution to achieving these goals by 2015.

A third proposal is to encourage Member States to include parliamentarians in their national delegations to the United Nations. It is already done in some cases, but can of course become more wide-spread and systematic.

Your draft resolution also proposes major structural reforms of the United Nations, and in particular the General Assembly, to increase the involvement of parliamentarians. These ideas merit further discussions and exploration. You may wish to enter into dialogue with your Governments to devise a strategy on how to pursue these proposals in the General Assembly.

Mr President,

The United Nations stands to gain much from a stronger and more systematic relationship with parliamentarians, the elected representatives of the Member States. As we all know, structural reform of the United Nations is a comprehensive, labour-intensive and complicated undertaking. For it to succeed, the broadest possible agreement must be reached between Member States. This will require time, energy and creative, forward-looking thinking.

There is, however, scope for improvement already within existing structures, and we should strive to make full use of them. In my Presidency of the General Assembly, I will remain open to take practical steps to improve the interaction between the General Assembly and parliamentarians around the world.

In this spirit, I am grateful for your contributions in this important pursuit, which aims to strengthen the roles both of the United Nations, regional organizations and other actors on the world scene, who strive to enhance the quality of international cooperation in a day and age when this is needed more than ever.