

20 November 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Parliamentary Hearing in the General Assembly**

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Excellencies,
Friends all,

I am very pleased to open this joint hearing with national parliamentarians and the General Assembly. I would like to congratulate my dear friend and former General Assembly President Theo-Ben Guirirab upon assuming his post as president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The IPU has been instrumental in bringing us together today and Mr. Guirirab's deep understanding of both institutions will assure the success of our unfolding dialogue.

We are here today to find ways to bring the United Nations agenda closer to the work of national parliaments. As the Secretary-General's report reveals, the partnerships between the United Nations and parliamentarians are increasingly rich and have deepened around many issues.

The central role that you as parliamentarians play in ensuring that international policies in the areas of peacekeeping, human rights, development and the environment are reflected in your national debate is of enormous support to us at the United Nations. Such debate ensures that citizens understand our work and therefore can better support the Organization.

Likewise, your work with us ensures that you can take advantage of the collective knowledge and expertise orchestrated here in making policy decisions, developing legislation and setting norms for your governments.

I look to you for understanding and support for some of the priorities that I have set for this session of the General Assembly.

Today the world faces a confluence of terrible crises that require radical changes in the international political and financial architecture. The food, energy and financial crises, all linked with climate change, are man-made problems and we must assume responsibility for solving them. To achieve these changes requires courageous, even heroic leadership at the national level. Visionary leadership is needed to assure that the breakdown we are witnessing does not turn into a prolonged tragedy for all humanity.

Both Secretary-General Ban and I recognize that parliamentarians can provide crucial guidance and support to the United Nations to make sure that this Organization can meet the responsibilities that billions of people have entrusted in us.

As you know, I have outlined a series of changes that I think will enable the United Nations, and the General Assembly in particular, to regain the authority that has been channeled to other organizations over the decades. As the General Assembly has grown to its current 192 members, making it the most representative body in the world, it has not grown in stature.

Rather, anxious powers have stripped it of much of its central role in international decision-making. My call for the democratization of the UN may sound radical, but its radicalism flows from assigning to this institution the original roles that are provided for in the Charter.

As you may recall, I have called for a series of high-level Dialogues on the Democratization of the United Nations in 2009. You all know how difficult and how important it is to apply the principles of democratic process in the work of government. Their implementation is the measure of our credibility and our effectiveness and this process will be a measure of the 63rd session of the Assembly as well. The first Dialogue will be devoted to discussion of the democratization of international financial and trade institutions; the second will focus on the work of the Assembly itself and in relation to other organs of the UN; and the third will deal with the work of the Security Council. The IPU has developed sophisticated and constructive positions on these issues and I invite you to participate actively in these debates.

Last month, in the face of the financial crisis that is spreading like a plague to every corner of the Earth, I convened a panel of experts to meet with Assembly members in a first step to ensure that all 192 Member States are involved in devising the solutions to our complex problems. I know that IPU debated this issue at your Assembly in October as well.

We must take advantage of the unique forum provided by the United Nations to build agreement on the new financial architecture required by the international community. Only full participation within a truly representative framework will restore the confidence of citizens in our governments and financial institutions.

Another priority is to ensure that we have the resources for development and especially for the campaign against the inexcusable poverty affecting half of the world's people. Next week national leaders will gather in Doha for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, a meeting that has taken on even more importance as a result of the global financial crisis. I see this meeting as a crucial step in ensuring that the commitments assumed by Member States are honored, and this is why I have decided to attend the Conference. I am pleased to hear that IPU will participate as well, demonstrating once again how we reinforce each other in our work.

In this regard, I have been gratified to hear world leaders express, often in deeply felt statements to this General Assembly, appeals for support and solidarity with the poor of the world. Leaders from the North and the South reiterated their commitment to financing development. I appeal to you to ensure

that your national leaders are represented in Doha at the highest level and reaffirm their commitments, especially in light of the economic downturn and faltering progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

This year we have passed the midpoint for the timeframe agreed upon to achieve the MDGs. As you all know, we have made progress on several of the MDGs, but progress in most countries is slow and uneven. This is simply unacceptable. I support the call for a world Summit of the MDGs in 2010 to assure that we can continuously monitor and adjust the specific national requirements for the MDGs. As those primarily responsible for the implementation of the MDGs, your continuing guidance will be central to this work.

I personally feel the issues of the right to food and the right to water and sanitation for all are paramount and have made these priorities of my Presidency as well. I say this knowing full well that the MDGs, in sum or in part, cannot be sacrificed or compromised in any way.

Finally, I want to point out that my overriding priority as President of this session flows from my deep conviction that we must awaken people from the moral coma in which we have lapsed. I am taking advantage of this bully pulpit – my Presidency -- to call for a new spirit in the way we treat each other and how we treat our fragile planet. I believe we have divorced ourselves from the essential values of compassion and solidarity in the unbridled pursuit of dominance and wealth. I know how hard it is to insert such appeals into national discourse, particularly as elected officials. People rarely want to hear bad news.

Today, however, people are looking for leadership -- men and women who have their interests at heart and the vision to get us back on the right path. They want leaders guided by a passion for justice and fairness and inclusiveness. They want governance based on justice, transparency and accountability. They are looking for ways to meaningfully participate in the rescue of our planet and in ending extreme poverty. I think all of us here aspire to that calling.

I welcome you, therefore, to bring difficult messages to your constituents. You can blame them on me. To start, we must address directly the unsustainable culture of over-consumption that is contributing to wild excesses and irresponsible speculation. We must have the courage to tell citizens the truth about the sacrifices that lay ahead. These sacrifices should be shared and cannot be placed on the backs of the poor as is usually the case.

This is not going to happen overnight. There is much damage to repair, including the corrosive damage to the sense of trust that must guide any relationship. Let us work together – national parliaments and the United Nations -- so that we deserve that trust and restore that trust.

Thank you.