



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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## **Speech by the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong, at the opening ceremony of the Joint Session of the Pan-African and Arab Parliaments**

Sharm El-Sheikh  
10 October 2016

Your Excellency Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt,  
Your Excellency Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament,  
Your Excellencies, Speakers of the Arab and African Parliaments,  
Speakers of parliaments and delegations,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in this opening ceremony of the Joint Session of the Pan-African and Arab Parliaments here in Sharm El-Sheikh. I thank the two Speakers of these Parliaments for their kind invitation to participate in this meeting. I also want to use the opportunity to congratulate them and the two Parliaments on taking this historic initiative. Yesterday when I addressed the ceremony marking the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Egyptian Parliament I spoke from the script but today I am going to speak from the heart.

Let me say that today's meeting, the Joint Session of the Pan-African and Arab Parliaments, is a historic event on a number of counts. It is testimony to the virtues of South-South cooperation which is enshrined in the New Development Agenda 2030. The venue of the meeting is also auspicious given that Egypt is at the junction between Africa and Arab and so can bridge the two communities. The event is also taking place at a particular moment in history when Egypt is celebrating 150 years of parliamentary life, so there is an experience of 150 years that we can all learn from. The meeting therefore is an opportunity for Egypt to continue to serve as a locomotive for the parliamentary community in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, when I was preparing for this meeting I looked at the membership of the IPU. I have been told that all the African parliaments are represented here and that all the Arab parliaments are too. And when I drew a rough calculation I see that some 70 parliaments are here. And all those 70 parliaments are members of the IPU which has a membership of 170, so this is high proportion of IPU parliaments present here.

I also have noted that the Arab parliament is an associate member of the IPU, whereas the Pan-African Parliament is yet to become an associate member. I therefore want to use this opportunity to encourage the leadership of the Pan-African Parliament to take steps towards joining the IPU fold as an associate member.

At the moment when we are having this joint meeting, I reflect back on questions that are usually put to me when they ask me how democracy and parliaments are faring. I respond that when it comes to Africa and the Arab world, I think that democracy is faring well. Parliaments are becoming more prominent and assertive. They are no longer taken for granted by the people or by the government. Parliaments are becoming more representative. We heard that the Egyptian parliament has women representatives, young people representatives, representatives of minorities and the like. I note that parliament is more assertive. It has more powers and is exerting more powers to provide resources for crucial areas, such as health. But, as we reflect on these achievements, we should note that this is not enough, and that we will have to continue to protect democracy and to strengthen parliaments, especially so, as I have said, parliaments and democracy is a work in progress. It is under assault on a daily basis and has to be defended.

And so I want to offer some thoughts for your discussions here. First of all, I think that there is much to be done in terms of asserting the independence of parliaments for exercising the important role of parliamentary oversight and I echo what President el-Sisi said yesterday that it is necessary a strong parliament in Egypt that is able to provide oversight to the government.

I also want to highlight the importance of parliaments being a citadel of integrity with its members. I note that it is important for parliaments to be more representative, which means that I would like to see more women, more youth, more disabled persons and more minorities in parliament. I have looked at the agenda and the issues that you will be debating, which are firmly on the radar screen of the IPU. Your discussions will provide you the opportunity to prove the ongoing relevance of democracy and parliaments. I have noted that you will be devoting some time to the 2030 development agenda and you'll be discussing climate change, which are all issues that are of prime concern to the IPU. I also note that you will be tackling terrorism and I am reassured that you will be coming up with measures that are intended to help parliaments contribute to the stemming of this scourge that is terrorism and violent extremism.

Let me also point out to the need for parliaments to contribute to peace and you are meeting in a region where peace has been elusive for several years now and it is important that you look at how to promote dialogue with a view to resolving the conflict in the Middle East. These are some of the issues I thought I could highlight here as you embark on the proceedings of this joint session of the Pan-African and Arab Parliaments.

I would like to conclude that, as you conducted deliberations, the IPU will be keen to take note or to receive the outcome of these deliberations. You can stand assured that IPU is always ready to support your parliaments in whatever endeavours you are engaged in to move this agenda forward.

I want to wish you successful deliberations and I look forward to seeing most of you in Geneva in a couple of weeks on the occasion of the 135<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.