



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Statement by the IPU Secretary General Mr. Anders B. Johnsson

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Over the last 14 years the IPU has been encouraging and, in many instances, assisting parliaments in addressing the MDGs. Over time we have seen parliaments assuming a more proactive role in addressing the MDGs and we have worked side by side with many of them.

We can draw several lessons from this experience. One of them is the importance of governance. If the institutions of the State do not function, citizens will not receive the services to which they are entitled. Good development requires democratic governance. Another has to do with discrimination and the rule of law. Discriminatory laws constitute a principle obstacle to providing access to treatment for persons with HIV and AIDS. And you will not be surprised that our organization also underscores the importance of gender equality and the full participation of women in politics and public life.

Over the last twelve months we have undertaken numerous consultations with parliaments and their members. We have informed them of progress in your deliberations. We have held debates. We have asked for their views and suggestions and we have encouraged them to debate the post-2015 sustainable development agenda in their own parliaments.

A central message we receive from them is that they want to see democratic governance as a stand-alone goal in the new development agenda. An overwhelming majority of members of parliament across the full political spectrum ask that the new agenda include such a goal.

They want the new set of goals to focus on the individual. The men and women they represent in parliament and whose views and aspirations they seek to represent should be at the core of your deliberations.

The members of parliament want the new development agenda to fully espouse the democratic fundamentals that should guide all countries everywhere namely participation, transparency and accountability.

The marriage between these fundamental democratic principles with sound and effective decision-making and implementation is what they refer to as democratic governance. We are talking of equity, access and power in our societies, which always come down to the question of who decides what for whom, and how decisions are carried out and services are provided.

The concept forces us to look at a whole range of institutions and processes and how these can be organized for the pursuit of the common good – as opposed to particular interests alone. From this perspective, democratic governance is also an end in itself, and not just a means, because it is not a luxury but an entitlement and a key dimension of human well-being.

Development and human progress in general are not just about material wealth, food, good health and so forth. People will only truly flourish when they can effectively participate in the decisions that concern them and that will determine their well-being in every aspect of their lives.

Parliament of course is a key institution of democratic governance as it is the place where all of the people should be represented, and where the government's decisions should be scrutinized so that there is full transparency and accountability. But there are of course many other institutions, such as public administrations, state audit institutions, the courts and the whole justice system, the media, watchdog organizations and so forth.

The operating system of this whole apparatus is of course the rule of law, the idea that ultimately no person or institution is above the law, that we are all equal under the law, and that we should all have recourse to the law to defend our rights.

As both an end and a means, democratic governance needs to inform the entire SDGs framework. Virtually every sustainable development issue, from poverty eradication to climate change, carries a democratic governance dimension.

Because democratic governance is in fact lacking in some respect or another virtually everywhere, and not just in developing countries, it is a good candidate for a dedicated goal.

Put simply, then, the reasons why a stand-alone goal on democratic governance is badly needed at this juncture come down to three - and in a way they are all inter-related.

The **first** and most obvious reason is that the people want it! There have been sufficient public manifestations in every corner of the world these last years to show that people want to have a say and they clearly want more democracy. Another strong indication comes from the My World global survey, which consistently shows the need for "honest and responsive government" among the top priorities. Our own surveys show a solid 80% of support among parliamentarians.

What we are witnessing around the world is an overwhelming sense of malaise. Nothing exemplifies this phenomenon more than the dramatic rise of inequalities virtually everywhere. Inequality is not a mere economic fatality, but very clearly a political problem, in terms of decisions made increasingly in the interests of the few, and by the few. And of course, the more people are excluded the more they lose interest in their own institutions, with a downward spiral of exclusion developing from there.

A stand-alone goal, more than "mainstreaming" targets throughout the SDGs, would broadcast to the world that we are finally serious.

The **second** reason for a stand-alone goal is that this is a very complex field, involving multiple institutions and processes, and not just at the national level. There is a critical mass of issues that need to be covered for democratic governance to have a transformational impact, and it is very unlikely that this can be done through mainstreaming alone. No goal can possibly cover everything; so there will need to be a careful selection and a balance among the various elements so that they act synergistically to actually make a difference in every country. For example, one could imagine a goal called "transparent and inclusive decision-making" that will also link the national to global level processes as one continuum.

At the national level, key issues of representation, transparency and accountability will also need to be addressed as one coherent cluster. It would make little sense for a goal to aim at improving representation in decision-making without also covering questions of accountability and transparency. Similarly, a dedicated goal would of course need to span across all key institutions and processes. So, to be clear, we are not advocating for a goal that is fixated on parliament alone, as important as that is.

Finally, and most important, the **third** reason for a stand-alone goal goes back to my earlier claim that this is an end in itself, as a dimension of well-being, and as a matter of human rights. They belong to each of us merely because we exist. They have been codified in international law and governments have an obligation to implement them at the national level.

If democratic governance was simply an enabler, then mainstreaming alone might be conceivable. Mainstreaming however cannot do for something that has a life of its own, and that carries forward a whole range of civic, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Is it possible to have a democratic governance goal? We affirm that it can be done. In fact it already is being done. Parliaments and many other State institutions are already applying democratic governance goals in many countries. They have set targets and established indicators to track progress. So have we in the IPU based on work currently being carried in several parliaments around the world.

Of course, and as we are often reminded, there is no “one size fits all” in all this. But that is true for other goals as well. Each country context is different and some countries will be more advanced than others in some respects, while doing less well in other respects. The design of a universal stand-alone goal on democratic governance will simply require the same flexible approach.

But I wish to conclude by affirming as emphatically as I possibly can that if the political will is there it is certainly possible to include a democratic governance goal that makes sense and can be applied by all countries in the world.