

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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Geneva, 11 June 2008

International Day of Democracy - 15 September

Dear Mr. President,

Few would dispute that a strong parliament is a vital sign of a healthy democracy. Parliament is after all the central institution within a democracy through which the will of the people is expressed, laws are passed and government is held to account. While the existence of a parliament may not in itself guarantee democracy, there can be no democracy without a parliament.

That is why we would like to encourage your parliament to mark the first International Day of Democracy this coming 15 September by some activity that could highlight the place of parliament in a democracy.

As you may know, the United Nations General Assembly established late last year this new International Day to celebrate democracy. Highly symbolically, the date coincides with the adoption, in September 1997, of the IPU Universal Declaration on Democracy.

We take the liberty of attaching a Note listing objectives and activities that your parliament may wish to consider when preparing for the day. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is at your disposal to provide documentary and advisory support. For example, we will be pleased to make available several copies of IPU publications on democracy to parliaments planning to celebrate the day.

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Mr. Kristian Pihl Lorentzen, MP
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We are also establishing a special section on IPU's website to give the widest possible publicity to the International Day of Democracy. The section will list the special events parliaments are organising, which will also permit parliaments to share information with each other. We would be grateful to receive information from your parliament on its plans for the International Day of Democracy so that we can include it on our website.

Please do not hesitate to share your thoughts or suggestions with us regarding how best parliaments and the IPU can mark this special day for democracy and parliaments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders B. Johnsson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pier Ferdinando Casini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pier Ferdinando Casini
President



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PROPOSALS FOR PARLIAMENTS TO CELEBRATE THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

Objectives:

This day would be an opportunity for parliaments to:

- Emphasize the importance of democracy, what it involves, the challenges it faces as well as the opportunities it offers, and the central responsibility that all parliaments have as the key institution of democracy;
- Examine and discuss how well parliament performs its democratic functions, possibly on the basis of a self-assessment, and identify what steps it may take to strengthen its effectiveness.

Proposed activities:

Parliaments could organize some form of event on democracy on 15 September (or as close thereto as feasible in the light of circumstances). Such an event could take multiple forms such as:

- Day of "open doors" in Parliament, when students and interested citizens could observe the parliamentary proceedings of the day;
- Special debate in parliament focusing on ways of making parliament and the political process more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, i.e. more democratic;
- National review of progress made in meeting international commitments in the area of democracy and human rights, with a focus on areas for future efforts;
- Reading of the *Universal Declaration on Democracy* and/or adoption of a parliamentary resolution or declaration marking the International Day of Democracy;
- Joint session / video-conference among two or more parliaments, addressing a democracy-related issue of common interest.

Parliaments may obtain copies of the IPU's democracy-related publications. Orders of up to 50 copies will be sent free of charge. For more than 50 copies, the cost of shipping and a nominal fee per publication will be charged. Please contact IPU for more details.

Periodicals and documents

- International Day of Democracy leaflet (2008)
- World of Parliaments special issue on Democracy (2008)
- Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997)
- Declaration on criteria for free and fair elections (1994)
- Panorama of parliamentary elections (2008)
- Women in Politics poster (2008)

Books

- Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice (2006)
- Free and fair elections (2006)
- Tools for parliamentary oversight (2008)
- The parliamentary mandate (2000)
- Democracy: Its principles and achievements (1998)