

J. C. Lund's speech at the 120th IPU Assembly

My fellow parliamentarians.

The power of words is indeed great.

Therefore I would like to thank the assembly for this opportunity to express myself to such a great number of good friends and colleagues.

The power of the word 'Democracy' is stronger than most. It is a symbol of civilization and hope around the world in countries where democracy unfortunately haven't yet been settled.

This is a good thing as it gives the powerless something to strive for; it gives them a goal and a purpose. It gives them the hope that some day they too get to control their own destiny.

This is why we must be gravely concerned by the growing devaluation of the word 'democracy'. If it is to remain a word of hope it cannot be allowed to become an empty phrase, devoid of all meaning.

There must be some parliamentary and institutional requirements, before we accept whether or not we are dealing with a true democracy.

We cannot just accept that any kind of regime can add the word democracy to its name, just because it sounds good.

One man one vote does not sum up what democracy is about.

There must be civil liberties if we are to talk about democracy.

There must be freedom of speech if we are to talk about democracy.

There must be protection of minority rights if we are to talk about democracy.

There must be equal rights for men and women, regardless of ethnicity, religion and political views.

For true democracy to exist there must be opposing political views represented on the ballot. And there must be free and fair elections. Journalists must be allowed to cover each viewpoint in length and breadth.

No candidate should be intimidated or driven to withdraw for holding controversial political views – instead he or she should be met with the power of the better argument and the greater vision for society.

No journalists should fear for their job or their life because they feel an obligation to print the views of all the political candidates and not just the views of the establishment.

Only if these requirements are met can we start to talk about true democracy. Only then will the elected parliament represent all the people.

Finally I would like to thank you all - both for your important work in the IPU and for listening to me for these few minutes.

The work of parliaments is the very core of society. We as parliamentarians have a duty and a responsibility to make sure that society is on the path towards democracy and a better world for our children and grandchildren.

It is a great pleasure to be in Africa. But I am deeply worried about the unconstitutional changes in this part of the world over the last years. Let us all condemn these changes. Therefore it is especially encouraging that the African Union has condemned these changes.

So as a parliamentarian and a grandfather I wish you all a good conference and I encourage you to keep fighting for democracy and all it entails.