

**Introductory remarks on Human Rights and Democracy,
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1. Democracy is an important global value and essential to progress on a wide range of human concerns (such as peace and security and sustainable development) and to protection of human rights and the rights of peoples and minorities.
2. Furthermore, democracy must also be viewed as a process. I believe we can never say: “we have achieved it, our democracy is ready”. Democracy requires constant alertness, active vigilance and continuous maintenance as well as an open mind for change. From the point of view, the word democratization is also appropriate: democratization as a process that leads to – a more open; - more participatory; and – less authoritarian society.
3. Democracy must be understood as entailing much more than a system of government in the sense of political power and political institutions based upon the will of the people. It is also on public participation in society as a whole; on openness; on access to information and justice; and on the realization of all human rights.
4. It is also pertinent to discuss the impact of the absence of democracy. Non-democratic states tend to generate over time conditions detrimental to peace and justice, development and freedom. Non-democratic States are all too often characterized by: - politicized military rule; - not only a weak lower but also a weak middle class; - a population constrained to silence; - prohibitions on travel; - censorship; - restrictions on the practice of freedom of religion; and – often institutionalised forms of serious corruption.
5. There exists a close relationship between democracy and human rights. Here the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 still serves as a masterful and inspiring document. It stipulates the right of all people to vote and the right of all individuals to take part in the government and to have access to public services. Relevant is also the right of all people to human dignity and to development as well as the right of all citizens to equality before the law, to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. In this way these rights have a cardinal role in any democracy as empowerment rights. Naturally, these citizen rights also have their counterparts in collective human rights such as the rights of peoples to self-determination and the rights of minorities to enjoy their cultural identity and have their political identity and other human rights recognised.
6. Democracy and the rule of law are two sides of the same coin. The rule of law is characterised by: - transparency; - separation of powers of the executive, the legislative and the judiciary; - an elected parliament as a pillar of democracy; and – principles of legality, accountability and separation of powers.

7. The new co-operation agreement concluded in July 2016 between the United Nations and the IPU provides an excellent framework and channel of communication for the work of the IPU and that of national parliaments on issues relating to democracy and human rights at an international level. Also the 17 Sustainable Development Goals can serve as an important point of reference. The SDGs include a specific goal on “Peace, justice and Strong Institutions”, advocating the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Under this Goal 16 two targets address specifically the role of parliaments: “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels” (target 16.6) and “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” (16.7).