

Speech by Mr. Kristian Pihl Lorentzen, Chairman of the Danish IPU Group, at the General debate on *Parliaments and people: Bridging the gap*

Madame President, fellow parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address you today.

The pleasure is caused by the many revolts against suppressing regimes we have witnessed during the last year. The Arab Spring, which dimensions and level of public support took us all by surprise, is an encouraging evidence that in the long run people revolt against dictatorship and suppression.

It all started in Tunisia, which had its first free and fair parliamentary election for many years in October 2011. And soon The Arab Spring spread to Egypt, Morocco and Libya.

Especially Muammar Kaddafi's regime in Libya was one of the more grotesque and suppressive, we have seen. A state ruled by one person's despotic powers. A person, who did not refrain from slaughtering his own people when they at last had enough, and demanded freedom and democracy.

In this most critical situation the international community proved that the principles of "Responsibility to Protect" had the intended value. On the initiative of the Arab League, the UN Security Council decided to establish a "no-fly zone" and to take all necessary measures to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by the Libyan leader.

I am proud of the prompt response by NATO, the European Union and the national parliaments to these Security Council resolutions. I am also proud of the active contribution by the Danish combat planes to protect Libyan civilians. The decision to deploy F16 fighters was adopted unanimously by the Danish Parliament.

But one thing is to get rid of an evil dictator. Another thing is to establish a real democracy and real parliamentarism. That takes time – a long time. I have the privilege to live in an old democracy, but even in Denmark we are constantly aware that democracy is not self-evident. It must be protected and fought for every day so we keep focus on bridging the gap between the people and the political power.

It is my sincere hope and expectation that the promising Arab Spring will lead to further dissemination of freedom and parliamentarism to other parts of the world, and to other countries. Single instances of steps backwards are inevitable. The transaction from dictatorship to real democracy is a complicated process which requires constant focus and a strong determination.

The risk is of course that the sudden loosening of a dictator's firm grip on a population will lead to instability and even armed conflicts. Even if the democracy and the democratic institutions must be decided, constructed and organized by the population itself, the international community – including the IPU - has a responsibility to assist - on request - with the experience it has gained through decades concerning the institutional and political state building. Instability and conflicts must be avoided.

The encouragement and hope, the Arab Spring brought to us all, do unfortunately not cover Syria. On the contrary. The situation in Syria and the massacres committed by the regime on the urban population, including women and children, are terrifying and completely unacceptable. We must urge the Syrian regime to put an immediate end to its suppression and killing of people of a different opinion.

The United Nations have made an impressive effort to focus on the situation. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has been clear in his condemnations of the bomb attacks and in his call for an immediate stop of violence.

Also the former Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, now Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, has made a valuable effort. The IPU must express its full support for the effort of UN and Kofi Annan to bring an immediate end to all violence and human right violation in Syria. Furthermore a political transaction to a democratic system in Syria must be facilitated by all relevant international organisations.

But what is the point of all that when there are still some states which are giving the Syrian regime their backing? I hope that those states realise that they have a huge responsibility for what is going on in Syria at the moment.

Madame President

On this background it is of extreme importance that all IPU member states strengthen the fight for real freedom, real parliamentarism, free and fair elections, the rule of law, and protection of human rights.

As we all know, a very important element in the protection of human rights is the protection of minorities, whatever minorities it might be: national minorities, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities – including of course also the obligation of states to protect homosexuals.

Let me conclude by stating that we parliamentarians have a vital role to bridge the gap between the people and the political power. Every day we must fight for freedom, real democracy, peace and protection of the human rights. Let us promise each other that we will do our outmost to promote and protect these fundamental values!

Thank you very much for your attention.