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# *A Parliamentary Vision for International Co-operation*

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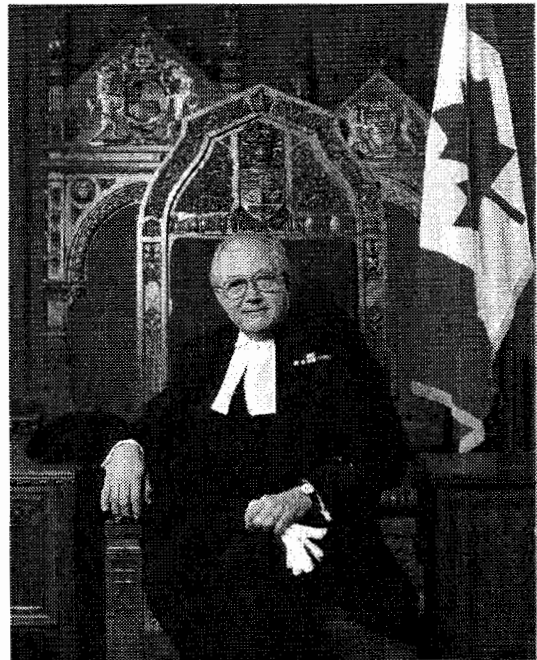
by Hon. Gildas Molgat

*In September 2000 the United Nations, in co-operation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organised a conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments to consider a draft declaration on "The Parliamentary Vision for International Co-operation at the Dawn of the Third Millennium." Among the Presiding officers to address the Conference were the Speakers of the Canadian Senate and House of Commons. The following is the presentation by Senator Molgat who was a member of the Preparatory Committee which worked on the draft declaration.*

I want to congratulate the people who had the ambitious idea of bringing together the Presiding Officers of our highest democratic institutions at a world conference at the United Nations. In this first year of a new millennium such an unprecedented gathering is strikingly symbolic. I can only applaud this conjunction of the most prestigious of all intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations, and the most representative inter-parliamentary organization in the world, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Need I recall the unconditional and enthusiastic support that Canada, Canadians and the Parliament of Canada have always given to the various missions of the United Nations? Canada's Parliament has been just as ready to support the objectives and action of the IPU. The co-operation between the IPU and the UN that began in 1995 has already borne fruit.

Two splendid examples are the campaigns orchestrated by the two parties in support of the accelerated signing and ratification of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines and the Treaty of Rome setting up the International Criminal Court. If the result of this Conference were to be even closer organic links between the



two organizations, we could only congratulate ourselves and the world would be better for it. The unity of purpose of two great international organizations working for peace, justice, development and human rights cannot fail to be mutually strengthening.

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*The Hon. Gildas Molgat is Speaker of the Senate.*

## **The Parliamentary Vision for International Cooperation at the Dawn of the Third Millennium Declaration adopted by consensus (September 2000)**

We, Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments, are meeting at the United Nations in New York on the eve of the Millennium Assembly to pledge our commitment to international cooperation, with a stronger United Nations at its core. We resolve to ensure that our parliaments contribute more substantively to this cooperation by making the voice of the peoples heard, thereby introducing a more manifestly democratic dimension into international decision-making and cooperation. To help impart fresh momentum to the United Nations, parliaments must be more closely associated with its work so as to give real meaning to the opening words of the United Nations Charter: "We, the peoples of the United Nations"....

### **The Parliamentary Dimension of International Cooperation**

We call upon all parliaments and their world organisation - the Inter-Parliamentary Union - to provide a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation. Parliament is made up of men and women elected by the people to represent them and express their aspirations. It is the organ of State that allows society in all its diversity to participate in the political process. Parliaments embody the sovereignty of the people and can, in all legitimacy, contribute to expressing the will of the State internationally.

To provide the parliamentary dimension, parliaments and their members must assume increased responsibility in international relations, play a more active role at the national, regional and global levels, and generally reinforce parliamentary diplomacy.

The parliamentary dimension must be provided by parliaments themselves first of all at the national level in four distinct but interconnected ways:

- Influencing their respective countries' policy on matters dealt with in the United Nations and other international negotiating forums;
- Keeping themselves informed of the progress and outcome of these negotiations;
- Deciding on ratification, where the Constitution so foresees, of texts and treaties signed by governments; and
- Contributing actively to the subsequent implementation process.

To achieve this objective, we undertake to review within our respective parliaments how best to make use of current parliamentary procedures so that parliament, with an active input by all parties and members, can make an appropriate contribution to governmental negotiations at the international level. Information-gathering should be reinforced to enable parliament to keep abreast of developments on international issues. Parliaments should also play a more proactive role in processes relating to the ratification of and compliance with international agreements. Throughout, parliament has a particular responsibility to engage the public in a continuous dialogue and facilitate its input into the decision-making process.

At the regional level, parliaments should make the best possible use of regional inter-parliamentary organisations and through them seek to influence the corresponding intergovernmental bodies. Parliaments should examine closely the work of such organisations in order to increase their efficiency and avoid duplication. They should also exchange experiences with a view to improving and simplifying national legislation.

At the international level, concurrently with the reinforcement of the political input of national parliaments into the process of inter-State cooperation, the Inter-Parliamentary Union should be consolidated as a world organisation for inter-parliamentary cooperation and for relaying the vision and will of its members to intergovernmental organisations.

Thus, we hereby solemnly confirm our support for the Inter-Parliamentary Union and our determination to participate in its work with renewed vigour, thus giving the IPU the means to discharge to the full the mission entrusted to it. In this process we also call upon the IPU to undertake such statutory and structural reforms as may be required to strengthen the organisation and its institutional links with parliaments.

By implementing this declaration, we propose to contribute substantively to international cooperation and to make the voice of the peoples heard within the United Nations, thereby pursuing the lofty ideals enshrined in the Charter and meeting the challenges facing the world community in terms of achieving peace, democracy, sustainable development and social progress.

We decide to convey this document to our parliaments, as appropriate, and to urge them to do everything possible to ensure that it is followed up in a practical and effective manner. We also request our governments to bring this declaration to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly for debate. Finally, we call upon the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to seek ways of strengthening their institutional links and practical cooperation.

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I am aware of the legal and procedural obstacles that are preventing the IPU from being given an appropriate and specific status within the United Nations structure. However, it is clear that the IPU's current status within the UN — that of a non-governmental organization — is not adequate. I am convinced that the IPU, which brings together some 140 national parliaments, deserves to be recognized as a world parliament and its status at the UN modified accordingly. I have complete confidence given the determination displayed on all sides, that the obstacles will be overcome. The time has come to move ahead.

I had the great privilege of being on the Committee responsible for preparing a draft Final Declaration for the Conference.

The Declaration is not free from a certain "political correctness", and there are those who will want to point fingers at analytical shortcuts or the utopian nature of some of its statements. What is the Declaration all about? The Final Declaration is a master plan, an action plan, which describes the far-reaching economic and technological changes that are buffeting the modern world. It sets out realistically what is at stake in the world today. It espouses the fundamental values that are the subject of quasi-universal consensus in the international community: peace, justice and equality.

The Declaration also has the merit of placing parliaments and parliamentarians at the centre of the national and global dynamic that is confronting contemporary challenges. It affirms the crucial role of parliaments in the

adoption and implementation of treaties and other international instruments. It underlines the growing importance of parliamentary diplomacy, and reiterates the inevitable place that parliaments must now occupy in international relations.

*Parliaments, as the Declaration so accurately observes, are the reflections and the agents of the civil society. As such, they play at the national level the role of mediator and are the vehicle for the aspirations of all citizens for a fairer, more peaceful and more egalitarian world.*

Lastly, the Declaration is an unequivocal profession of faith in the United Nations, the main instrument of the new world order so earnestly hoped for. For all these reasons, I believe that the Declaration must not simply be submitted to the heads of state and government who are attending the special UN Millennium Summit in this very spot a few days from now. It also has an educational value for the world. It must be widely distributed, so that it can fuel the national and international dialogue for a better world.