



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

143rd IPU Assembly

Madrid, Spain
26-30 November 2021



Opening remarks by the IPU President Mr. Duarte Pacheco

143rd IPU Assembly – Madrid, 26 November 2021

Your Majesty,
Madam President of the Community of Madrid,
Madam Speaker of the Congress and Mr. President of the Senate,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

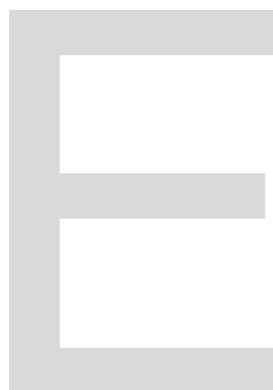
Bienvenidas y bienvenidos! I am delighted to welcome you to the 143rd IPU Assembly, here in the vibrant and beautiful city of Madrid. Let me begin by thanking our hosts – the Kingdom of Spain and its Parliament. Their dedication and diligence in organizing this Assembly at such short notice and amid the many challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, are indeed admirable. I hope that we will all live up to your expectations and that our work together will lead to stronger solidarity, robust action and positive change for the good of our peoples.

Dear friends,

You can only imagine what a pleasure and a privilege it is for me to greet you at our first in-person Assembly in over two years. As I have said before, nothing can replace direct interaction. By meeting in person, we can build good relations, understanding, trust and even friendship. I invite all of you to take advantage of this occasion, to have fruitful discussions and to work together to find solutions to the major challenges facing our world today.

Twenty months ago, we began a harrowing journey through an unprecedented health crisis. We have lamented the loss of more than 5 million people around the world. Many steps have been taken to overcome this pandemic, but we still have a long road ahead of us. As we speak, vaccine inequity continues to undermine the global recovery. COVID-19 has worsened the disparities between our nations. It has halted and reversed meaningful and hard-won achievements in our quest to eradicate poverty, build strong democracies, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

These past two years have been marked by a dangerous retreat from our shared commitment to democracy and human rights. We have been witnessing an epidemic of military coups and direct attacks on the institution of parliament: Sudan, Mali, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Guinea immediately come to mind. We must stand together with determination and solidarity, engage with our colleagues in these countries and firmly call for the return to constitutional order, with strong, representative and effective parliaments as a vital part of society.



#IPU143

We have a responsibility to build back better, and even to build back bolder. Since our virtual Assembly in May, our critical work to this end has continued:

In September, **Speakers of Parliament convened in Vienna** to examine how parliamentary leadership can lead to more effective multilateralism which delivers for the people and the planet. Their message was strong and clear: we cannot go back to business as usual. COVID-19 recovery strategies must mainstream gender equality, youth participation and action on climate change. We need to extend our efforts to lessen inequalities, address the roots of conflict, and build more peaceful and human-rights-driven societies. With the Vienna Declaration, we have a roadmap which can lead us in the right direction.

The IPU's work on climate change continues. Two years ago, at our Assembly in Belgrade, we adopted an emergency resolution on climate change, urging parties to implement the Paris Agreement. We committed as parliamentarians to work with our governments and other stakeholders to combat the climate crisis. Friends, the recent IPCC report is a wake-up call. We need to do more, and we need to do it now.

Over the past two months, the IPU held two important parliamentary meetings in Rome and Glasgow, in the lead-up to COP26. We adopted a strong outcome document which we, as parliamentarians, now need to carry through. We must legislate so that our climate action is entrenched in strong legal foundations. We must oversee policies and strategies to address climate change, so they are implemented swiftly, effectively, and with accountability. And we must ensure that these policies are inclusive and representative, leaving nobody behind.

We know that crises are never experienced in a neutral way: both climate change and COVID-19 have disproportionately affected **women and youth**. Eighty per cent of people displaced by climate change are women. Women have been in the majority on the frontline of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, bore the brunt of unpaid caring responsibilities and were more likely to drop out of the labour market for good. During COVID-19 lockdowns, domestic violence reached alarming levels. The pandemic also intensified our youth's vulnerabilities in the areas of labour, education and healthcare. Ensuring the full and inclusive participation of women and youth in all aspects of society and decision-making – including parliaments – is crucial.

The IPU is strongly committed to this objective. Over the last year, the IPU has worked hard to support legislation to stop discrimination and violence against women. And we have continued our work supporting parliaments to become more gender-equal and more youthful. I encourage all of you to join the IPU's '*I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!*' campaign to empower young MPs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this Assembly, we chose to focus our general debate on the current risks facing parliamentary democracy, and specifically those risks that stem from extreme polarization and division.

The great paradox of the 21st century is that technology allows us to be more connected to each other than ever before. Yet, we live in an age of polarization, mistrust and disinformation. In other words, the same innovative devices that connect us are also profoundly dividing us. Do not get me wrong, these technological advances in communication are wonderful tools that have contributed enormously to public access to knowledge and information. But they come with risks of spreading falsehoods, fuelling anger and eroding the fabric of democratic societies.

Technology has rapidly changed the way in which we live, communicate and interact. It has allowed us to continue our work at the IPU over these past months. It has allowed parliaments to work even at the height of the pandemic. But we must continue to adapt our institutions to this new reality and to make our parliaments more open to the people we represent. And our efforts must be made at the national and the international levels. We can find common ground through multilateralism, solidarity and leadership, prioritizing decision-making processes that are participatory and evidence-based.

Friends, we need to talk to each other, to overcome extreme polarization and build back our sense of community. We can convey a message of hope, not hate. And just as importantly, we can **listen** carefully to one another. I look forward to hearing your perspectives and proposals as to how we – as parliamentarians from all over the world – can promote cooperation and trust, and safeguard democracy in an age of growing division.

My fellow parliamentarians,

We are going through turbulent times. We face many challenges, but we have many opportunities to adapt and reinvigorate our efforts and develop solutions based on parliamentary democracy. I am pleased that, after extensive consultations with our membership and discussion in the Executive Committee, the new IPU Strategy for 2022-2026 is ready for adoption at this Assembly. Challenges continue to evolve, and we are aiming to build a greener, more flexible and more resilient IPU that can better support its Member Parliaments on important issues where parliamentary action is required.

And so, dear colleagues, I am honoured to open the first in-person Assembly in two very long, difficult years. We are back. We must seize this opportunity to reinforce our commitment to our shared values of inclusiveness, respect, integrity and solidarity. And, if we really want to change this world, we must turn our words into resolute action.

Thank you.