

143rd IPU Assembly
General Debate on
Contemporary challenges to democracy:
Overcoming division and building community
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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on our democratic societies, posing unprecedented challenges to our multilateral system, personal freedoms, the reliability of information and the ability of democratic institutions to cope with the rapidly changing societal demands. These add up to an already turbulent decade for democracy, that saw the rise of intense polarization and intolerance, increased conflicts, widened public distrust and deepened societal divides.

The list of challenges faced by the international community is a long one. The persistent impact of the financial crisis, that caused widespread economic distress and austerity, led to growing public discontent over inequality, worsening living standards and social injustice.

The migration and refugee crisis following the Syrian civil war, which led to the highest levels of displacement ever recorded, exacerbated discontent on issues of fairness, cultural and societal integration.

Rapid technological advancements, particularly the growth of social media, has radically changed democratic participation over the past few years. This has boosted opportunities for citizen engagement on digital platforms and also fostered transparency. On the other hand contributed to the spread of misinformation and 'fake news' that undermine the very foundations of democracy.

The pandemic caused unprecedented hardship for citizens, with restrictions on freedom of movement and the right to assemble, as well as the postponement of electoral processes. These profound changes to how we live, work, study, socialize and travel, will have a permanent impact on our societies.

However, our deliberations here today, can bring forward proposals as to how political systems and parliaments can cultivate a culture of cooperation and political dialogue to overcome divides and build inclusive societies. While promoting the green and digital transition to encourage innovative developments that will bolster our democratic ideals. How the IPU and its member Parliaments respond to the economic and social distress left in the wake of COVID-19 will ultimately determine the course of democracy in the 21st century.

There are no simple solutions to any of the challenges currently facing democracy worldwide. Yet the IPU can and will rise to its mission to defend and enrich its fundamental values and democratic principles.

The road ahead in a post-pandemic world will not be easy – but the political determination and solidarity expressed today, promises to bring to the spotlight new approaches that can renew and safeguard democracy. Through concerted efforts, at both the national and international levels, we can lay the foundations towards a better future for every citizen around the globe.

Thank you for your attention.