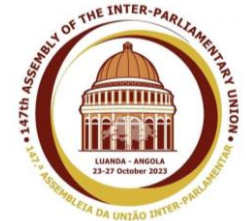




Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

147th IPU Assembly

Luanda, Angola
23–27 October 2023



Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Inaugural Ceremony of the 147th IPU Assembly

Luanda, 23 October 2023

Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Angola, Mr. João Lourenço,
Your Excellency, Speaker of the National Assembly of Angola and my very good friend,
Ms. Carolina Cerqueira,
Your Excellency, First Lady of Angola, Ms. Ana Dias Lourenço,
Your Excellency, Vice President of the Republic of Angola, Ms. Esperança da Costa,
Mr. Duarte Pacheco, distinguished President of the IPU,
Distinguished Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations,
Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,
Members of Parliament from IPU Member Parliaments,
Other dignitaries gathered here,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to speak to you today at this very auspicious and momentous occasion. As the Right Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly of Angola has just said, this is the first time that we are having an IPU global gathering in an African Portuguese-speaking country. Let me at the very outset thank His Excellency João Lourenço for his strong support. We have been monitoring the preparations for this very important event and we know that he has been a strong supporter of all that Angola has been doing to host us in these very auspicious circumstances. Let me also pay immense tribute to the Speaker of the National Assembly, Carolina Cerqueira. Your approach has been very hands-on, making sure that all the details are taken care of, under the watchful eye of our very good friend, Idalina Valente, who is in this room somewhere. She has been one of the architects of this Assembly.

I am very thrilled to be here, in a country that typifies resilience. The Speaker of the National Assembly just mentioned that this country has witnessed the worst of civil strife – conflict, let's put it that way – but has been able to rise from that conflict and project itself into modernity. And I want to commend His Excellency, the President of the Republic, for being a champion of peace, a champion of inclusion in his country – not only in his country, but I know that he is deeply involved in efforts to resolve other conflicts, especially in this region. So Mr. President, I wish to commend you on your efforts.

I said that I was very pleased to be addressing you here. And my pleasure is even doubled because, for the second time in a year, the IPU is here in my mother continent, my home continent, Africa: this is a very great honour indeed for us Africans. Indeed, exactly one year ago, we were in Kigali, Rwanda, for our 145th Assembly. And in a way, Rwanda typifies what we see here, its similarity with Angola, a country that has gone through the throes of conflict over several years, but which has been able to rise again. And these two countries, Angola and Rwanda, are to me like the legendary phoenix: they seem to be about to die but then they rise from the ashes and become stronger. I'm really proud that these countries have not yielded to despair, but rather have used conflict as a means of doing better for their citizens. I am very glad that we can come to this country now as the global parliamentary community and witness first-hand what the authorities are doing to live up to the expectations of the people for peace, as Madam Speaker mentioned.

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Let me come to the theme of this Assembly. We meet here under the theme of peace, justice and strong institutions. Who would disagree with me that that theme resonates very well, in this day and age, with what we're experiencing worldwide and also in our neighbourhood here? I don't think that there's anybody who would dare to challenge the relevance of this theme. We are meeting on a continent that has known its own fair share of conflict, crises, poverty, exclusion, inequalities – you name it. These have orbited for a long time. And we see that there are strenuous efforts coming out of this cycle of crisis. And this continent, I believe, is full of potential. And that is what we want to encourage the leaders of the world, especially in this region, to do: to mobilize that potential in support of their communities.

Earlier this year, I had the good fortune of paying a visit to several West African countries, pursuant to a mandate entrusted to me by the IPU governing bodies, who asked me to go and witness first-hand what was happening in these countries that are riven by conflict: Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and now Niger and Gabon. What's happening there? Why the instability? I was pleased to meet a cross section of stakeholders, their Heads of State, parliamentary authorities at the highest level and ordinary citizens. And I must say that I came away very humbled by what I witnessed: people struggling to get on with their lives but nourishing strong hopes for a better future.

That is what I noted in many countries. And I came away a bit reassured, from the discussions I had with the various Heads of State, that they were keenly aware of these expectations and challenges. I just want to launch an appeal here to say that, as they pursue the efforts to lay stronger foundations for new societies that are beneficial to the people, they should listen to the voices of those people that I met there. The reality of Africa came to me when I visited some of the camps for displaced persons. And I came away with greater resolve to urge the IPU to mobilize the global parliamentary community, to support the leadership and the people of those countries. As I had the opportunity to say during one of the legs of that visit, we must learn to demystify power. We must learn that leaders are there and are expected to serve the people and not to serve themselves. We need – I think, Madame Cerqueira said it – committed leaders, strong leaders, and not strongmen.

So let me just use one example, to illustrate what we hope will come out of the discussions here about strong institutions. Charity begins at home, as they say, and strong institutions for us, first and foremost, means strong parliaments. We think that for parliaments to be strong and therefore democratic, they have to be representative, transparent, accessible, and especially accountable to the people who put them there. It is only in this way that they can make democracy work for the people.

Let me just use a few seconds to talk about one of the hallmarks of democracy, strong parliamentary representation. We are meeting in a country which has strong gender equality credentials. You heard in the introductions reference to the First Lady of Angola, to the Vice-President of the Republic of Angola, another woman we have here, and to Ms. Cerqueira, the Speaker of the Parliament of Angola. I think she did say that women are present all through the Parliament of Angola. Women actually account for 31.5% of the parliamentary membership, which is above the global average of 26.7%. So, congratulations to Angola.

We are also meeting in a sub-region that has sterling gender equality credentials. I was doing my homework when I was preparing to speak at this ceremony to see how women are represented in this region, the Southern African region. There are 12 parliaments led by women in the Southern African region. And I think it's only Zimbabwe and Botswana that have male Speakers in the Southern African region, if I'm not mistaken. So, Angola has a woman speaker. Zimbabwe has a woman President of its Senate. Zambia, South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique, Uganda, Madagascar, Rwanda – all of these, women Speakers.

And so this led me to say that the place of women is at the top, not at the bottom. And this makes sense in terms of legitimacy. It makes sense in terms of effectiveness. It makes sense in terms of restoring trust between the citizens and their governing institutions. It makes sense that it has the potential to leave no one behind, which is the mantra of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I would like to conclude by saying that we need to factor in something that has the potential for making parliaments stronger in this day and age, and that is digital tools. Parliaments and parliamentarians ignore digital transformation at their own risk and peril. So we must harness the potential of digital transformation, the digital tools that are out there to make our processes more effective, and more attuned to the needs and aspirations of the people. And I think that we have the experience of COVID that we can fall back on. During COVID, parliaments remained open for business, because they were able to mobilize new technologies to perform the duties for which they are elected.

And so, I wish to conclude my very lengthy presentation speech by reiterating what I always say in circumstances such as the one we are gathered here for. I want us to live up to the expectations of the people, to live up to the motto of the Inter-Parliamentary Union: for democracy, for everyone. We have to make democracy and parliaments work for everyone here. That is a bounden duty for parliaments and they have it within their powers to make it happen. They represent society as a whole. And we owe it to the people who have entrusted us with that responsibility. Again, they ask for something very simple. They want to live in peace and dignity. They want to live in justice. They want to live with prosperity as a fundamental human right. Surely this is not too much to ask of the parliamentary community? And I hope that we can leave here at the end of these few days more invigorated to rededicate ourselves in service of the people that we represent.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.