



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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## Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

### Opening of the 148th IPU Assembly, Geneva

Geneva, 24th March 2024

Mr. Secretary General,  
Honourable Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

It is a great honour to address you here today, at the start of my first Assembly as President of the IPU. The IPU Assembly has returned to Geneva after a long and somewhat unexpected absence of almost six years, due partly to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also thanks to the generosity of our Members, who have hosted hugely successful Assemblies since 2019 in Qatar, Serbia, Spain, Indonesia, Rwanda, Bahrain and Angola. Let me also welcome to our Assembly for the first time the Honorable President of the Senate of Jamaica, who is observing our proceedings with a view to possible re-affiliation to the IPU and becoming the 181st member of this global parliamentary community. Universality is key here at IPU.

The theme of this Assembly, *Parliamentary Diplomacy: Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding*, goes right to the heart of why the IPU was founded 135 years ago. Indeed, our Statutes, in their very first article, emphasise that the IPU has been “the focal point for worldwide parliamentary dialogue since 1889”. Against the backdrop of an alarming rise in the number and intensity of conflicts – no less than 56 States were experiencing armed conflict at the end of 2023 – it made perfect sense to choose this theme and, indeed, to adopt peace and security as the IPU’s focus policy area for 2024. This subject is also at the top of my priority list as President, and I believe that the process to amend the IPU Statutes and Rules, on which a Working Group of the Executive Committee has been constituted and will begin discussions at this Assembly, offers a valuable opportunity to revitalise the IPU’s agility in reacting to crises around the world, including conflict.

The IPU was founded on the principle that dialogue is central to the peaceful resolution of conflict. For decades, we have consistently worked to bring together parliamentarians from countries in conflict – whether that is Israel and Palestine through the work of our Committee on Middle East Questions, the Russian Federation and Ukraine through our Task Force devoted to that conflict, or our Call of the Sahel initiative, focused on a region of Africa where there has been particular turmoil in recent years. Even further, IPU intends to intensify its use of dialogue in other conflicts exemplified by those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Venezuela, Pakistan, and many more!

Parliamentary diplomacy offers a valuable complement to diplomacy between Heads of State and Government and should be embraced by those wishing to foster peace. We particularly recognise and salute our Speakers from Armenia and Azerbaijan, who have heeded to the call, under the auspices of IPU, to engage and explore the use of dialogue to enhance the two countries’ bilateral relations. They met at IPU HQ on 22nd March 2024.

When I was elected IPU President in October 2023, I knew that my top priority would be to foster peace and security, which necessitated my visit to the Middle East in November 2023, in the wake of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7th October 2023, and the resultant war on Gaza. I visited both Palestine and Israel to meet with government and parliamentary authorities to explore ways the global parliamentary community can contribute towards a sustainable peace solution through dialogue and diplomacy. Our efforts continue to date through our Committee on the Middle East Questions.

Conflict is at once a cause and a consequence of inequality, injustice, and discrimination. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians must stand up for the most vulnerable and combat discrimination in all its forms. Parliaments, by their very nature, represent people from all walks of life and political perspectives and are thus ideally placed to take a holistic approach to addressing conflict and building peace. The empowerment of young people and women is key to this, and indeed, these two aspects have been cornerstones of the IPU’s work for many years. The IPU’s latest research has shown

that the share of women in national parliaments has again increased and now stands at 26.9%, but this is only 0.4 percentage points higher than a year ago. Progress remains painfully slow, and we can certainly do more to ensure that women are better represented in our institutions. We need to adopt a gender lens in all our work, transform our parliaments into welcoming, respectful, safe and gender-sensitive institutions, and strive for parity at all levels, including leadership roles.

The IPU believes in a strong and effective multilateral system, with the United Nations at its core, as the only way to foster sustainable development, peace, security and stability. Parliaments have a vital role to play in upholding and revitalising that system while ensuring that their governments respect international law and implement international treaties and other agreements. We have a valuable opportunity this year, in the guise of the UN Summit of the Future, for parliamentarians to identify potential proposals for UN reform and to influence the direction of the multilateral system for years to come. Nonetheless, the Sustainable Development Goals remain an important guiding framework, and we must continue to acknowledge that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace.

I encourage you all to take the opportunity of this Assembly to look to the future, to share good practices and learn from one another, and to focus on what parliaments and parliamentarians can do to leverage the unique attributes of parliamentary diplomacy to create a more peaceful and tolerant world for all.

That said, I will now turn to give you a synopsis of what the President, on your behalf, was able to do since her election on 27th October 2023, five months ago.

Thank you.