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## Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Inaugural session of the Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

Geneva, 29 July 2025

Madam Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva,  
Madam Riniker, President of the National Council of Switzerland,  
Mr. Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU,  
Mr. Rattray, Chef de Cabinet of the United Nations Secretary-General,  
Mr. Douglas, UN Messenger of Peace and our very special guest,  
Esteemed Speakers of Parliament,  
Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament!

It is my great honour to greet you as President of the IPU and Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania.

First of all, I want to thank you, Ms. Valovaya, for hosting us in this magnificent, newly renovated Assembly Hall. For the past five years, the UN Office at Geneva has been pursuing its Strategic Heritage Plan, aimed principally at modernizing and preserving this historic building to make it fit for purpose for the 21st century. I congratulate all those involved in transforming and protecting this impressive room – you have truly done a wonderful job.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to Mr. Rattray, for participating in the preparatory process for this Conference on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres. Your support to us has been invaluable.

The UN is our close partner because, since our first Conference in the General Assembly Hall in New York in the year 2000, our vision has always been about strengthening the UN-led multilateral system in the face of mounting global challenges. Parliaments have a key role to play in this regard.

The IPU is engaged with the UN one way or another on practically a daily basis. We cooperate on virtually all of the main issues on the international agenda, from poverty to climate change, sustainable development, democratic governance, gender equality, disarmament, science and technology, and human rights.

The IPU Assemblies cover all of these topics in their many dimensions and conclude with resolutions that provide guidance to parliaments around the world, as well as input to the relevant UN processes.

The unique aspect of this Conference is its level of representation. We come together every five years because of the special leadership role we exercise as Speakers. Our purpose is not to come up with a new policy agenda, but to take stock of where we are as a parliamentary community and to boost parliamentary action in support of agreed commitments.

From our Speaker's Chairs in each house of parliament, we can do more than act as guarantors of parliamentary procedures: we can help our parliaments look beyond the immediate debates of the day and keep an eye on the big picture.

Short-termism is one of the many ills of our times. It forces too many of our fellow parliamentarians to act quickly and reflexively, looking for immediate gratification for this or that group. It is what ends up distracting us from the issues that matter most.

And what are those issues? I will group them in three categories:

- peace, as the supreme good of humanity and the most important condition for development, individually as well as collectively,
- the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms, as key pillars of democracy,
- the provision of education, health, housing, nutrition, decent work and a healthy environment for all, as the affirmation of fundamental human rights.

The Declaration that we expect to adopt at this Conference builds on IPU positions over many years and provides a clear vision of what we need to do as a parliamentary community going forward.

To advance resolutely toward that vision, we must first contend with the divisive politics that pit people and parliamentarians against each other, leaving little room for dialogue and compromise. The divisions within our societies are not just ideological but have their roots most tangibly in inequalities that are becoming entrenched and growing wider, with power and wealth concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

We need to counter the destructive force of injustice with a political culture of cooperation, solidarity and unity, based on the simple construct that we are here in this world together, and that we are all dependent on one another. Inclusion should be a key tenet: our institutions need to reflect diverse experiences and ideas, and we can achieve that through the greater participation of women and youth, people with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations.

Indeed, there is no such thing as a totally self-made person: we are all products of our communities and of our interaction with others, starting with our parents, day after day, for our entire lives.

In Africa we express this idea in one word: Ubuntu. Which roughly means: I am, because you are.

Likewise, there is no such thing as a nation that can live and prosper in isolation from the rest of the world. There can be no national interest defined in total juxtaposition to what is good for the world as a whole. Now more than ever, as the world has grown smaller and more interdependent, countries need to work together to find solutions to their common problems.

The UN-led multilateral system was created 80 years ago, in the wake of a devastating world war, precisely out of this fundamental realization. To anyone who thinks that the UN and multilateralism have run their course, I say: think again.

The problem with the UN today does not come so much from its institutional set up, but rather from the same divisive politics that afflicts so many of our countries. When countries cannot reach agreement at the UN or fail to deliver on their UN commitments, it is often a reflection of dysfunctional politics at home.

In each country, parliaments are part of the system of government and constitute the main political arena where opposing interests need to be reconciled. So, getting our parliamentary houses in order, through dialogue and cooperation, and with the search for the common good as our shared objective, is a key step to making multilateralism work more effectively.

The multilateral system today is being challenged, and there is indeed an urgent need for UN reform to render the system more efficient, more impactful and more accountable. However, our multilateral system is not broken. A broken system is one that cannot renew itself, whereas the UN has undergone countless changes over the years to keep the organization up to speed with the times.

Colleagues,

There is no question in my mind that our best hope for peace, justice and prosperity for all, is through a stronger multilateral system with parliaments playing a key supportive role.

We must guard against a negative narrative that posits the United Nations as powerless, and ultimately dispensable.

Those who seek to undermine the multilateral system and the central role of the UN do so very intentionally as a way of weakening the rules that were meant to benefit the entire international community.

Weaker rules always benefit the more powerful, who have the means to assert their will over the others, sometimes getting away with murder, literally, with total impunity.

Let us work together to make sure that we retain and reinforce this vital institution. This is our responsibility as Speakers and parliamentary leaders working for the good of all our people.

In his famous inaugural speech many years ago, President John F Kennedy pronounced some powerful words that resonate to this day as a universal call to action: ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.

To which I add, humbly: ask what you can do for the world.

Thank you.

We will now see a short video on the IPU's 136th anniversary.