



THE HON MILTON DICK MP
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
DELEGATION LEADER, AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO THE IPU

GENERAL DEBATE SPEECH: 153rd INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, ARUSHA

**Enhancing good governance and empowering communities through
inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all**

President and fellow delegates,

I would like to thank the Speaker, Retired Honourable Mussa Azzan Zungu, and the National Assembly of the Republic of Tanzania, for hosting the assembly here in the beautiful city of Arusha.

Asante sana Tanzania!

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this important issue on behalf of the Australian Parliament.

As Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, I am acutely aware that social inclusion and gender equality are fundamental requirements for good government and democracy. Over the recent years, I have spoken at the IPU about a number of priorities that I believe are critical to strengthening democracy both in Australia and around the world.

These include harnessing the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence, advancing sustainability and climate resilience, promoting women in parliamentary leadership, and ensuring transparency and accountability in public institutions.

Today, however, I want to focus on an issue sits at the heart of this debate: youth participation, civic education and building trust in our parliamentary institutions.

Trust in institutions is not built overnight. It develops when people feel heard, respected and included in public life. For young people in particular, trust grows when they understand how democratic institutions work and when they see that their voices matter.

I want to highlight some of the ways the Australian Parliament is working to strengthen engagement with young people and create meaningful opportunities for participation in our democracy.

Meaningful participation of young people

Australia strongly believes that freedom of expression is a fundamental part of a vibrant democracy and is committed to ensuring individuals can enjoy the same human rights online as they enjoy offline.

However, we also recognise the importance of balancing the opportunities presented by technology with the risks posed by misinformation, disinformation and the impacts of social media on young people.

I have previously spoken at the IPU about Australia's landmark decision to introduce a minimum age requirement of 16 years for access to social media platforms.

I am pleased to report that Australia's approach has helped stimulate important global discussions about how we better protect children from online harms, mental health risks, addictive design features and the exploitation of personal data.

We welcome continued dialogue on these issues and believe there is significant value in parliaments learning from one another's experiences.

Bringing parliament to the (young) people

Misinformation and the harms associated with social media are amongst some of the key challenges which are testing trust in the institutions that underpin our democracy. In this ever-changing world, the involvement of young people in public decision-making processes is more important than ever before.

We have more than 3 million young people in Australia today. I have made it my mission as Speaker to bring our Parliament to young Australians wherever they live across our vast country. My goal is to share the values of our democracy so that children grow up understanding how our institutions work and how to contribute to it.

With this aim, I launched bi-partisan initiatives to make civics education accessible to students regardless of where they lived in Australia.

In collaboration with local federal members, I visit classrooms across the country to bring parliament to school students, and I have now visited more than 200 schools.

I truly believe civics should be taught in every single classroom around the world. Through the IPU, there is an opportunity for parliaments to work together to share educational resources, best practice and innovative approaches to civic learning. By investing in civic education today, we can help build informed, engaged citizens and strengthen trust in our institutions for generations to come.

We need to provide opportunities for students to engage with parliament and understand how to become active and constructive participants in our democracy and community.

This year, I launched the Australia's first National Youth Parliament. 150 young Australians from every corner of our country gathered at the Australia Parliament to gain first-hand experience of our parliamentary system.

Something I think all Parliaments should have the opportunity to establish.

This year also marks the 125th anniversary of the Australian Parliament and the Australian National Flag. As part of our civics education outreach, I take one of the flags flown above Parliament House to schools around the country, giving students a tangible connection to our national history and parliamentary institutions.

Through these practical initiatives, I am committed to strengthening the involvement of young people across Australia in public decision-making.

Our responsibility is to ensure future generations inherit institutions that are inclusive, accountable, representative and trusted.

The IPU is uniquely placed to support this work by bringing parliaments together to share ideas, strengthen participation and empower future leaders.

My objective is to ensure that all young people recognise that they have an important place in our institutions and can contribute meaningfully to it.

I thank the Assembly.