



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

THE SPEAKER

PO Box 15 Cape Town 8000 Republic of South Africa
Tel: 27 (21) 403 2911
speaker@parliament.gov.za
www.parliament.gov.za

**ENHANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWERING
COMMUNITIES THROUGH INCLUSIVITY, TRUST AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL**

**IPU 153 ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLY ADDRESS**

**BY
HON. THOKO DIDIZA
SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

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***The Honourable President of the Assembly,
Honourable President of the IPU, Dr Tulia Ackson
Honourable Presiding Officers,
Honourable Members, and
Distinguished guests,***

We gather in Arusha for this 153rd Assembly at a fitting moment, as Dr Tulia Ackson, the first African woman to lead this Organisation, brings her term as President to a close. In doing so, she stands as a shining example to millions of young women and girls, illustrating the remarkable contributions women can make when afforded equal opportunities to lead.

South Africa extends its sincere appreciation to Dr Ackson for her leadership and dedicated service to the IPU, and for her lasting contribution to strengthening this Organisation. We also thank the United Republic of Tanzania for its warm hospitality in hosting this Assembly. To all the candidates seeking to succeed Dr Ackson, we wish them every success in their campaigns. The election of a new President during this Assembly will shape the Organisation's direction in the years ahead.

The theme of this Assembly: *enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all*, speaks directly to the challenges facing parliaments today. Across our nations, citizens judge institutions by results. They expect safety, integrity and a genuine role in decisions that affect them. These expectations must guide our deliberations and actions.



Honourable President,

Many countries today do not suffer from a shortage of laws, policies, or institutions. Nor is there a shortage of commitments to inclusion, equality and participation. The challenge is implementation and enforcement.

Too often, a gap persists between rights guaranteed on paper and realities on the ground. Women, young people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups continue to encounter barriers despite legal and policy frameworks designed to advance inclusion and equality. Rebuilding public trust therefore requires tangible results, not additional commitments.

Parliaments have a critical role to play here. Citizens expect institutions that not only make commitments but also monitor implementation, ensure accountability and act when obligations are not met. Effective oversight, transparency in the use of public resources and the fight against crime, including corruption, remain essential to strengthening confidence in democratic institutions.

Trust itself cannot be legislated. Citizens earn it when they see public resources used responsibly, services delivered effectively, and leaders held accountable for their actions. Conversely, when corruption, exclusion, violence, and inequality persist, confidence in institutions diminishes. We cannot be comfortable with the persistence of violence against women and children, nor with the conflicts, humanitarian crises and other violations of human dignity that continue to affect millions of people around the world.



These realities remind us that laws and commitments alone are insufficient unless they are matched by implementation, accountability and political will.

Meaningful public participation must go beyond consultation. Citizens should be able to see how their voices shape outcomes. This is particularly important for women, young people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups whose perspectives are often underrepresented in decision-making.

The same erosion of trust is visible at the global level. We cannot be comfortable with the persistence of violence against women and children, nor with the conflicts, humanitarian crises and other violations of human dignity that continue to affect millions of people around the world. These realities remind us that laws and commitments alone are insufficient unless matched by implementation, accountability and political will.

The global conflicts, climate pressures and rising cost of living now before this Assembly are not separate from the trust deficit we are discussing. No country can resolve these pressures alone. Disruptions to global trade and energy supply in recent months have driven up shipping costs and fuel prices worldwide, a reminder that instability anywhere in the global system is felt everywhere. Parliaments have an important role in ensuring that legitimate national interests are pursued in ways that support, rather than undermine, the collective action these pressures demand.



Honourable President,

The South African experience reflects a reality familiar to many nations represented here today. More than three decades into our constitutional democracy, South Africa has built strong democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, a vibrant civil society and a constitutional framework that protects the rights and freedoms of all. These achievements remain a source of pride and a foundation upon which we continue to build.

South Africa has also sought to advance inclusive governance through legislation such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, the Promotion of Access to Information Act and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act. These measures reflect a recognition that citizens should not merely be beneficiaries of governance, but active participants in it.

Yet, as elsewhere, the central challenge remains translating these commitments into meaningful improvements in people's daily lives.

I recently had the privilege of participating in a CEDAW webinar on General Recommendation No. 40, which reaffirmed the vital role of parliaments in advancing the realisation of human rights. The discussion left me with a central lesson that resonates with the theme of this Assembly: rights, opportunities and inclusion are most meaningful when institutions have the capacity and political will to implement and enforce the commitments they have undertaken.



Recent parliamentary attention has focused on issues that most directly affect citizens, including energy security, social protection, local government performance and community safety. These priorities reflect an understanding that public trust is strengthened not by processes alone, but by tangible improvements in people's lived experience.

Our accountability framework is reinforced by legislation such as the Public Finance Management Act and the Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Act, which strengthen Parliament's capacity to scrutinise public expenditure and assess whether public resources translate into meaningful outcomes for citizens.

Equally important is our commitment to public participation. Through public hearings, constituency outreach programmes, the Taking Parliament to the People initiative and the formal petitions system, citizens are afforded opportunities to engage directly with Parliament. Independent constitutional institutions, including the Public Protector and the South African Human Rights Commission, provide an important additional layer of accountability and protection.

Yet, despite these measures, structural challenges persist. Poverty, economic inequality, youth unemployment, gender-based violence and service-delivery shortcomings continue to weigh heavily on communities.

For citizens, the true measure of democracy is not found in institutions alone, but in whether there is water and electricity in the home, safety in



the community, quality education for their children and opportunities for decent work.

Honourable President,

Strengthening public trust in democratic governance is among the most urgent responsibilities. Through parliamentary diplomacy and global platforms like the IPU, we have a unique opportunity to learn from one another's successes and shortcomings, sharing practical models that close the gap between policy intent and public reality.

That learning matters because, ultimately, citizens will not judge us by the number of laws enacted or declarations endorsed. They will judge us by whether public institutions make a tangible difference in their lives: whether they can find work, access quality services, live free from violence, participate meaningfully in public affairs and trust that those entrusted with public office act in the public interest.

That is the standard our institutions should strive for, and the standard by which citizens will judge us.

Thank you.

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