

153rd IPU Assembly & Related Meetings

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Enhancing Good Governance and Empowering Communities through Inclusivity, Trust and Opportunities for All

**Honorable Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address this distinguished Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the beautiful city of Arusha, Tanzania.

We are pleased to come together to deliberate on the important theme, **“Enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all.”** This theme speaks directly to the fundamental responsibilities of Parliament.

As Parliamentarians, we have a fundamental responsibility to listen to the voices of the people we represent and to ensure that governance responds meaningfully to their aspirations, concerns, and expectations. This relationship between citizens and their institutions is built on trust. Indeed, inclusiveness and trust lie at the heart of good governance.

These principles are particularly relevant to Sri Lanka’s parliamentary experience. Allow me to share some of the initiatives and lessons that have shaped our approach to strengthening inclusivity, trust, and opportunities for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we discuss inclusiveness, it must be grounded in respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice, democratic participation, and the rule of law.

To begin with, the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law to all persons. Article 12(2) guarantees the fundamental

right to non-discrimination on the grounds of “race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.”

Creating an inclusive society must be a fundamental commitment of all democratic governments and must be upheld through the rule of law. This is crucial to ensuring that all citizens are treated equally and without discrimination. In particular, diverse countries such as Sri Lanka must ensure that every citizen is treated with dignity and equality, regardless of race, religion, language, caste, sex, or disability.

Parliament encourages all citizens, including the most vulnerable, to participate in the democratic decision-making process. I am pleased to say that, for the first time in parliamentary history, the current Tenth Parliament includes 22 women, representing 9.8% of its membership. In previous Parliaments, women’s representation in the legislative process remained below 7%. Furthermore, two of the 22 women Members represent the Malayagam community. Their participation contributes to a more inclusive Parliament in which the voices of different communities are represented and considered in democratic decision-making.

Another important aspect of inclusiveness is ensuring the full participation and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities. For the first time, a member with a disability is serving in the Tenth Parliament. Recently, this member was awarded the prestigious 2026 New Parliamentarian Award by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), in recognition of his contribution to promoting inclusive democracy.

There are dedicated parliamentary caucuses that focus on addressing the issues faced by women and persons with disabilities and on contributing to policy development. The Women Parliamentarians’ Caucus and the Parliamentary Caucus for Persons with Disabilities are at the forefront of these efforts. In particular, the Women Parliamentarians’ Caucus focuses on issues affecting women in Sri Lanka while promoting and protecting their rights, dignity, and equal participation.

Furthermore, Parliament has established a Select Committee to examine and report to Parliament with recommendations to promote gender equity and equality, with particular emphasis on women’s empowerment. Moreover, the Parliamentary Caucus for Persons with Disabilities was established in 2025 to identify the problems, expectations, and

suggestions of persons with disabilities and to work towards solutions to ensure an unhindered social life for them. Importantly, Parliament is also considering a new legislative framework to replace the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we consider the importance of trust, we recognise that trust is the foundation of a strong democracy. We can strengthen public trust by making parliamentary processes more open and accessible, encouraging public participation, and ensuring that parliamentary committees effectively examine issues that affect the lives of our people.

In Sri Lanka, Open Parliament initiatives were introduced in 2019 to bring Parliament closer to the people and strengthen public engagement. Through these initiatives, some of the barriers under the Standing Orders that had previously limited public involvement in parliamentary proceedings were addressed. Open Parliament initiatives are intended to address the widening gap between Parliament and citizens and to enhance interaction with the people. In particular, Parliament has recently introduced the broadcasting of parliamentary debates with sign-language interpretation through television and social media, helping to connect with persons with disabilities.

Our oversight role is equally important in strengthening public trust. Through effective oversight, Parliament can ensure that government institutions remain transparent, accountable, and responsive to the people. Effective parliamentary oversight provides citizens with confidence that those entrusted with public authority are held accountable for their actions and decisions.

In Sri Lanka, parliamentary committees such as the Committee on Public Finance (COPF), the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA), and the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) are responsible for scrutinising the use of public funds allocated for development and other government activities. Through these committees, government institutions are required to explain how public money is spent, thereby

ensuring that they remain accountable and responsible for their actions. Another significant development has been the opening of parliamentary committee proceedings to the media and civil society. In particular, opening the proceedings of COPE and COPA to the media has enabled the public to gain a better understanding of Parliament's role in overseeing the Executive.

Above all, let us ensure that democracy delivers tangible opportunities and dignity for every citizen. The Parliament of Sri Lanka stands ready to contribute to this shared endeavour and to learn from the experiences of fellow Parliaments.

Together, through parliamentary cooperation, dialogue, and collective action, we can strengthen good governance and empower communities to build more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable societies.

Thank you.