



GENERAL DEBATE

153rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly

5-9 October 2026

Prepared for: Lord Tuílakepa

Chairperson

Committee of the Whole House

Legislative Assembly of Tonga

President of the IPU, Your Excellency Dr. Tulia Ackson

Honourable Speakers, Members of Parliament, General Secretary of the IPU, Colleagues and Friends

1. Malo e laumalie. I bring warm greetings to you all on behalf of the Speaker Lord Vaea and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga.
2. May I express my heartfelt gratitude to our gracious hosts, the Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania, Rt. Hon. Mussa Azzan ZUNGU for the warm welcome and hospitality we have enjoyed.
3. Our theme, “Enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all,” speaks to the work expected of every member parliament of the IPU.
4. For Tonga, it means reaching communities spread across a vast ocean, including those far from the capital. It means listening to their concerns and ensuring that our laws and budgets respond to their needs.
5. People need to know that they can question public decisions, receive a fair response, and have a say in their future.
6. Madam President, Trust depends on how we carry out our duties. In Tonga, the Auditor General, Ombudsman and Anti-Corruption Commission report to Parliament. Their findings help us examine public spending and the conduct of public institutions.
7. As we speak, the Parliament of Tonga is undertaking a comprehensive inquiry into Ministries, Departments and Agencies across the Public Service. The Parliament of Tonga through its PAC and Anti-Corruption Committee are scrutinizing the use of public funds and resources and are seeking explanations and check that corrective action is taken by Ministers and management across all our government departments.
8. As MPs, we must also accept scrutiny of our own conduct. The standards we expect of others must apply to us. We have undertaken

a review of our Rules of Procedure against democratic benchmarks to ensure that we are adopting the best legislative practices to manage the business and conduct of the Assembly and its Members.

9. Our theme also asks us to consider who is heard. Tonga's Youth and Women's Parliament programmes have given participants opportunities to debate concerns such as education, health, climate change and illicit drugs. School and community outreach helps people understand Parliament and how to contribute.
10. Tonga's recent ratification of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* is another important step. Parliament must now support its implementation through legislation, budget scrutiny and oversight, whilst ensuring that persons with disabilities themselves remain central in any decision making. Their experience can show us where barriers remain and what needs to change.
11. Madam President - Community participation also helps us make better laws. In Tonga, consultation on bills can include written submissions, radio discussions with callers, and community meetings. A concern raised in a village may reveal a problem missed during drafting. As we convene here, consultation will take place in Tonga on a new *Public Finance Management Bill 2026*, which overhauls the Public Finance Management framework in Tonga.
12. Research and committee scrutiny help us assess these views. After a law is passed, we must examine whether it is working and whether its benefits reach those most in need.
13. Technology can assist. Artificial (or Super) intelligence may also help small parliaments with limited staff and technical resources with research, draft translations and generate clearer explanations of complex material.
14. But care is essential in the use of A.I. An inaccurate answer or translation can mislead a decision. We must check sources, protect confidential information and guard against bias. Responsibility must

remain with parliamentarians and staff to ensure the ethical and responsible use of A.I, coupled with us law makers seeing how this new technology can be regulated so that it does not adversely our small countries.

15. Radio and face-to-face meetings must remain available so that limited internet access does not become another barrier to participation.
16. Madam President- these are shared concerns across the Pacific. The Pacific Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, PIPA, held its first General Assembly in September (where the Speaker of Tonga is its interim chair). It gives our parliaments a forum to share practical experience, strengthen oversight and widen participation with other small parliaments in the Pacific.
17. United Pacific parliaments can bring our communities' needs more clearly into regional discussions and thus have a stronger voice and presence here at the IPU. Together, we can advance this year's theme in ways suited to our island circumstances.
18. In Tonga, faka'apa'apa means respect, and tauhi vā means caring for our relationships. These values guide how we listen and respond to our people.
19. We leave this Assembly with a responsibility to put its discussions to use: strengthening public trust, opening participation and helping our communities share in opportunities for a better future.
20. Mālō 'aupito. Thank you.