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### Report of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

(IPU Headquarters, Geneva, 8-9 February 2019)

The meeting was held at IPU Headquarters in Geneva on 8 and 9 February 2019. It was chaired by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Ms. G. Cuevas Barron, and was attended by the Speakers of the Parliaments of Chad, Cyprus, Ecuador, Kuwait, Namibia, Niger, Serbia, Tonga, Uganda, and the United Arab Emirates. The Speakers of Parliament of Algeria, Austria, Chile, China, and the United Kingdom were represented by senior members of parliament. In addition to Mr. Chen (China), other members of the IPU Executive Committee were also present: its Vice-President, Mr. K. Kosachev (Russian Federation), Mr. K. Lusaka (Kenya), Ms. H. Haukeland Liadal (Norway). The Vice-President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians and the President of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians attended in an ex officio capacity.

Mr. M. Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) was designated by the United Nations Secretary-General to represent him and participate in the work of the Preparatory Committee. In addition, high-level officials of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women also participated. In addition, a representative from the Belarus Permanent Mission in Geneva attended the meeting in an observer capacity. Mr. Alan Stoga, Chairman of the Board of the Tällberg Foundation, addressed the meeting as a guest speaker.

*A minute of silence was observed in memory of Speaker Luveni from Fiji, a member of the Preparatory Committee, who had passed away in December 2018.*

Opening the proceedings of the Preparatory Committee, the IPU President provided an overview of the process that had started almost twenty years earlier, in advance of the UN Millennium Summit, when parliamentary leaders first set forth their shared vision for the parliamentary dimension to international cooperation. Heads of State and Government had heeded this call and through their own Millennium Declaration had pledged to strengthen cooperation between the UN and national parliaments – through the IPU as their world organization – on matters relating to peace and security, economic and social development, democracy and the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. Since then, World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament had been convened every five years by the IPU in close cooperation with the United Nations, and they had served to take stock of the overall political and economic situation in the world, to examine challenges faced by parliaments in delivering on the needs and expectations of their citizens, and to gradually develop the role of parliaments in global governance.



#IPU140

Following the President's introduction, an initial round of remarks by the members of the Preparatory Committee provided food for thought for possible themes to be taken up at the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. These included: the tension between the executive and legislative branches; growing inequality; the sustainable development agenda; youth empowerment; lack of trust in democracy and its institutions (the need to restore trust in parliaments by strengthening them, promoting openness and transparency and fighting corruption, and ensuring better delivery to the people); the relevance of parliamentary democracy; the disconnect between politicians and the people; gender equality and women's rights; development, peace and security; the rise in terrorism and extremism as major threats to peace and security; multilateralism as a gateway to shared peace and development; and climate change; ensuring responsible governance of technological development including the ethics of technological innovation. Participants felt strongly that the Speakers' Conference, should of course speak to past and on-going issues but should more importantly address emerging challenges.

The IPU Secretary General presented the outcomes from the four previous Speakers' Conferences, held in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, the first two and most recent at UN Headquarters in New York and the third edition at UNOG. He explained that the Conference was for the parliamentary community what a Summit of Heads of State and Government was to the executive. The previous Conferences had all examined the role of parliaments on the global arena and had indeed brought a parliamentary contribution to major UN events, such as the Millennium Summit and the 2015 UN Summit launching the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The purpose was to bring about greater accountability and thus bridge the gap in international governance. Multilateralism had also informed the debates. The main leitmotif had been a desire by Speakers to bring parliaments to the United Nations and ensure that its decisions were informed by the concerns and needs of the people. The more recent Speakers Conferences had stressed the need to strengthen the link between democracy, parliaments and outcomes for the people.

Mr. A. Stoga made a presentation on the current state of democracy in the world entitled *The age of disruption*. Based on polling in several countries and other trends, the presentation underscored the loss of faith in institutions, the collapse of global governance and the decline of multilateralism, including the erosion of the multilateral trade system. The data showed a correlation between income inequalities and the rise of populism and nationalism.

Major events such as Brexit in Europe pointed to an identity crisis and climate change, if left unchecked, would have catastrophic effects, particularly in Asia and Africa. The fourth industrial revolution brought hope as well as challenges and gene editing and brain technologies posed ethical questions. Automation would have a profound impact on the labour force and the way people lived and functioned. The Speakers were challenged to think about a regulatory framework for innovation and technology with ethical boundaries and to keep abreast of the rapid changes taking place in the world.

The presentation was supplemented by figures on wealth and income inequality based on reports by Oxfam, the ILO and the Global Inequality Index. In 2018, the 26 wealthiest persons in the world owned the same amount of wealth as the poorest 3.8 billion people. As things stood, the concentration of wealth, income and information was excessively skewed. The world was in transition and historically, periods of transition were messy and violent.

Mr. M. Møller brought greetings from the UN Secretary-General, a former MP. Both he and the UN Secretary-General were strong believers in the power of parliaments and MPs. The links between the United Nations and parliaments went far back and that relationship had grown in depth. Against a backdrop of trust in institutions at record lows and multilateralism under attack, parliaments had their finger on the pulse of people's concerns and were the bridge between the local and international levels. The relationship between the United Nations and parliaments was mutually beneficial. He considered that the 2030 Agenda offered a huge potential for parliaments to play a more substantial role on the international arena.

An overview of the parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations was provided, followed by an interactive discussion between the Speakers and UN representatives. Some Speakers voiced their frustration over what they considered to be a general lack of recognition of the role of parliaments and the peripheral role of MPs in UN meetings. Others considered that the dominance of the executive left little or no space for parliaments, whose role was relegated to one of mere rubber-stamping.

Mr. M. Møller reiterated the massive trust deficit – the loss of trust in politics and institutions, at both the national and global levels. This was exacerbated by the gaps between the haves and have-nots. The current context of uncertainty, fragmentation and harsh economic difficulties required a deep governance transformation. The only way to regain trust was to prove that institutions were efficient and relevant and could make a difference to people's lives. There was a need to reinvent multilateralism, perhaps reformulated as international solidarity. A new or additional set of rules must be established the collective management of the affairs of the planet. Problems were becoming more integrated and solutions more fragmented as the UN Secretary General had noted. A polycentric and multi-stakeholder approach was needed. The narrative of leadership must change.

The various representatives of the UN specialized agencies present underscored the critical role of parliaments in their own work and highlighted a number of successful joint initiatives undertaken with the IPU, including the organization of events and the publication of handbooks for parliamentarians. A number of good practices were showcased and should be replicated; cooperation should also be deepened. The representative of UN Women said that 2020 would mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and proposed that that milestone could somehow be incorporated into the Speakers' Conference.

Although the IPU had been the only parliamentary organization in existence when it was founded in 1889, the proliferation of parliamentary structures had been observed over the past decades. Today, there were over 130 parliamentary organizations, associations and networks. Some were organized thematically, others were considered as NGOs, and others still were supported by the United Nations or Bretton Woods institutions. They had been created to fill a void but their existence now led to overlap and duplication. That in turn placed a strain on national parliaments. The IPU also had to grapple with its reputation of being a travel club for MPs. Efforts to streamline and achieve coherence had been modest. Many such organizations were already Associate Members or Permanent Observers of the IPU. The IPU had been reaching out to those entities at Assemblies but participation had been low.

Some Speakers felt that regional assemblies were useful insofar as they provided a smaller platform for shared concerns and best practices specific to the region. They proposed that the IPU should conduct a comprehensive study of all parliamentary organizations and networks so as to identify and overcome overlap. Others considered that the various parliamentary organizations played complementary roles, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), which provided exchanges and cooperation and the IPU that developed useful tools such as self-assessments. It was felt that the strength of the IPU was its convening power. By bringing parliaments together it helped increase understanding and strengthen cooperation.

Referring to the ongoing campaign to establish a Parliamentary Assembly of the United Nations, participants questioned the usefulness of such an Assembly which might be subservient to the United Nations, not have any binding powers, among other shortcomings. They reiterated the recommendation that the IPU should rather be strengthened to serve as the voice of parliaments at the United Nations. The IPU had a strong convening power that could be strengthened to allow it to mobilize parliaments and parliamentary organizations in a bid for deeper engagement with the United Nations. The IPU's role as a forum for dialogue, experience and knowledge sharing could be harnessed better and its capacity to federate parliamentary organizations in view of greater coordination and coherence should be strengthened.

The vision of the IPU was embodied in its Strategy for 2017-2021. It was premised on strong, democratic parliaments at the service of the people. To promote parliaments, democracy and the rule of the law, which are at the heart of IPU's mandate, the organization placed emphasis building the capacity of parliaments to deliver on their mandate; building inclusive decision making processes, especially of women and youth; defending the human rights of MPs and human rights more generally and modernising the institution with better use of IT and innovation, for greater outreach to citizens, transparency and efficiency. Speakers highlighted innovative mechanisms to engage with youth and citizens, such as "thematic" parliaments (youth, environment etc.) that fed into the formal legislative process; open days in parliament; educational initiatives on democracy; internal reforms for more balanced representation in decision making positions. The growing challenge of relevance of parliament and connection with citizens was a key one which required serious attention.

The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs had been devised to set the planet on a sustainable course. The role of parliaments in achieving those goals, especially Goal 16, had been specifically recognized by the United Nations. Based on the latest SDGs scorecard issued in 2018, no country was on track to achieve all the goals by 2030. Greater political will and resources were needed. Parliaments must be fit for purpose to play their role and leave no-one behind, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable persons. It was important to note that a one-size-fits-all approach could not work as countries were at different levels of development. Parliamentary oversight and regional cooperation were thus necessary to achieve the SDGs. The 2020 Speakers' Conference would coincide with the fifth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda. It would be opportune therefore to examine ways of speeding up implementation of the SDGs including mobilizing additional resources from the private sector and other non-State actors.

The year 2019 marked the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IPU. To commemorate that landmark anniversary, the organization would seek to reinforce its position as the global organization of parliaments with 130 years of experience. It would also seek to reach out to the world's 46,000 MPs as based on estimates, only 10-15 per cent of MPs in the world were aware of the IPU. With democracy under siege, the IPU could help restore trust. A story-telling exercise about the IPU's history was envisaged that could be linked to the present: episodes about peace, dialogue and mediation over the years, from the Cold War to inter-Korean dialogue. In terms of timelines, the main event would be held on 30 June 2019 (the IPU's birthday) but other events would be held throughout the year.

A global multimedia parliamentary campaign would be launched, comprising a serialized story and a media kit. Speakers were encouraged to engage with MPs. Ideas such as publishing a book, establishing a charter and an award for outstanding MPs would be the subject of further discussion within the Executive Committee. Members were being urged to amplify the message and Speakers were invited to send the Secretariat lists of their MPs. They were also being asked to submit names of outstanding MPs and influencers and to organize a special event to commemorate the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The milestone would provide a golden opportunity to showcase the organization and its achievements.

Following a discussion about the venue and dates of the Conference, it was decided that consultations would be held with the United Nations to identify mutually convenient dates in summer/early autumn 2020 for the Conference. In the meantime, with New York and Geneva having been excluded as potential venues due to visa restrictions in the former and little appetite for the latter, it was decided that an open consultation would be carried out through a letter to all Members and a final decision on the venue would be taken at a special session of the Preparatory Committee to be held in Doha on the occasion of the 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly. Austria and Kenya had already expressed an interest in hosting the Conference and both had UN offices on their territories.

The proposed letter to IPU Member Parliaments should specify the conditions for hosting the Speakers' Conference: financial and logistical capacity to host; visa and security guarantees; and a strong UN presence on the ground. It would be sent to all Members by 1 March 2019. In the meantime, the onus was on the members of the Preparatory Committee who had made proposals for possible themes to prepare short reports for reflection for their next formal meeting in October/November 2019.

The participants made a number of recommendations, which can be found in the [Annex](#) to this report (Summary of recommendations).

## **First meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**

### Summary of recommendations

- The Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament should be linked to the UN 2020 Summit which coincides next year with the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Conference should ideally take place in a country with a strong United Nations link, in the presence of the UN Secretary-General and the President of the UN General Assembly.
- The exact dates of the Conference will be set in consultation with the host country and the United Nations, but should in principle be in advance of the UN Summit in late summer/early September 2020. The President of the IPU should present the outcome document of the Conference to the UN Summit.
- The Conference will allow the Speakers to address a large number of issues relating to peace, democracy, sustainable development and global governance, while ensuring that the deliberations centre on the concerns of the world's peoples and on the identification of avenues for parliamentary action to meet these concerns and expectations.
- The Conference will allow the Speakers to consider progress made in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to identify ways of speeding up implementation, and to articulate their views on other pressing issues of the day such as climate change, growing inequality, women's and youth empowerment, and the erosion of trust in politicians and public institutions (the need to restore trust in parliaments through such measures as fighting corruption, ensuring openness and transparency, free and fair elections, promoting human rights), managing technological innovation and development and the ethical challenges they pose.
- The Conference will also allow the Speakers to address questions relating to parliamentary diplomacy and the need to strengthen the United Nations and multilateralism in general, and their own role in advancing this agenda. The Conference will highlight best practices and illustrate the strategic partnership between parliaments, the IPU and the United Nations.
- The Conference will further allow the Speakers to examine the role of parliaments in promoting democracy and the rule of law at both national and international levels. It will allow them to exchange views on the challenges they encounter in building strong democratic institutions and exchange experiences on strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation.
- The Conference should examine the role of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the position of the IPU as a convenor, mobilizer, coordinator and expression of the voice of parliaments at the United Nations.
- The Preparatory Committee will decide on the theme of the Conference at its next formal session in October/November, and will commission reports on the main points to be included on the Conference agenda. Building on the experience from the previous Speakers' Conferences, the Conference agenda should ideally reflect three points: that efforts will need to be made to bring politics and parliament closer to the people and ensure democratic governance and the rule of law, that the Fifth World Conference will be closely linked to the 2020 UN Summit, and the role of parliaments in addressing the major global challenges of the day.
- A brief special session of the Preparatory Committee will take place in Doha, Qatar, in April 2019 on the occasion of the 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, in order to decide on the venue and dates of the Speakers' Conference in 2020.
- The members of the Preparatory Committee who proposed possible themes will be tasked with preparing preliminary reports for the second formal meeting later in the year. Possible themes include: inequality and social justice, management of new technologies, youth engagement in politics, peacebuilding and parliamentary diplomacy, democracy and the rule of law, sustainable development—focus on climate change and financing for development, migration, terrorism and violent extremism, reinventing multilateralism and regional cooperation, governance and the economy.
- The IPU Secretariat will also follow up on the many views expressed during the discussions and prepare more detailed proposals for decision by the Preparatory Committee at its next meeting.