



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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# Opening remarks by the IPU President, Mr. Duarte Pacheco

142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly

26 May 2021

Distinguished parliamentarians,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is the moment, the official opening of an IPU Assembly, when parliamentarians from around the world come together with a unity of purpose and a shared commitment to parliamentary dialogue and cooperation.

This is the moment when our values, ideas and aspirations converge into a strong impulse to strengthen peace and representative democracy.

And this is the moment when we remind ourselves of our responsibility to ensure that parliaments are not pushed to the edges of political landscapes but take centre-stage in creating conditions that empower people to lead their lives with dignity.

I am honoured to join so many fellow parliamentarians from across the globe – over 750 MPs from 135 countries – at an Assembly like no other before it.

Dear Colleagues,

It was not so long ago that I first appeared before you as the newly elected President of the IPU. While I am honoured to be in the position to mark a historic moment for the Organization – the opening of the first ever virtual IPU Assembly – I am also overwhelmed by the scourge that is currently unfolding before our eyes.

More than 3 million people have lost their lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with a climate crisis and a recession on a scale not seen in nearly a century, the pandemic has reversed some of the great progress made in human development. Decades of work has been erased in a blink of an eye, and millions of people all over the world have fallen again into extreme poverty. We are no longer navigating along the predictable path mapped out by our increasingly interconnected world before the pandemic.

The radical uncertainty that came with the pandemic has thrown many obstacles in our way as we work together to address the imperatives of our time. This radical uncertainty has also exposed the challenges facing governments in instigating real and forward-looking change and upholding the values of democracy.

Equally significant is the impact of the pandemic on societies. It has worsened existing weaknesses, deepened structural inequalities, and made life particularly difficult for women and girls and the most vulnerable.

The pandemic began over a year ago and we have now reached a point where a new way of thinking, innovative approaches and a genuine openness to change are needed if we are to fully understand and confront the unpredictable and complex challenges of our time. This can only be achieved in societies that are resilient, equitable, inclusive and fair.

Although the pandemic has tested parliamentary resilience, I have no doubt that parliaments, as custodians of human rights and the rule of law, must be at the centre of societies equipped to serve people above all else.

Dear friends,

Our efforts to build new foundations to bring together so many voices from around the globe, and to embrace the virtual world while maintaining what is most valuable from the in-person one, have all come together to position this IPU Assembly as a unique global platform for a wide-ranging discussion on how to overcome the pandemic today and build a better tomorrow.

Over the past few weeks, in meetings of the Standing Committees and the Forums of Women MPs and Young MPs, we have discussed how parliaments can play a central role in post-pandemic recovery efforts, across peace and security, sustainable development, democracy and human rights, and the gender and youth dimensions.

The **first** element of our response concerns vaccines. Access to vaccines is too fragmented, uneven and slow. Over 1.32 billion vaccine doses have been given to people across the globe but much more needs to be done to bridge the wide gaps between vaccination programmes in different countries and regions.

It is particularly worrying that more than 80 per cent of vaccines have been given in high and upper-middle income countries, and only about 0.3 per cent in low-income countries. We must advocate for vaccine accessibility as a global public good.

**Second**, there is ample evidence that our institutions – particularly those involved in good governance – contribute significantly to development and growth. Positive contributions come from inclusiveness, responsiveness, efficiency and fairness. We must ensure that these institutions are fit for purpose and meet the needs of society, with parliaments exercising their legislative function without constraint and ensuring accountability. Moreover, a new social contract is needed between people and government, grounded in human rights.

**Third**, inclusiveness is non-negotiable. Women and youth have borne the brunt of the impact of the multiple overlapping crises that COVID-19 has provoked. They must be part of the recovery and take their rightful place in the world of politics where decisions about the future are made. As an example, at the current rate, it will take another 50 years before gender parity is achieved in parliaments worldwide.

With 50 per cent of the world's population under 30, there is a huge deficit in the political representation of young people. This must change. Women and youth must have a greater role in the world of politics.

**Fourth**, economies should be rebuilt, underpinned by new ways of thinking about sustainable production, consumption, environmental preservation and the care economy. This should be consistent with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs can serve as a foundation for COVID-19 recovery

strategies, addressing both the current global health crisis and the many challenges facing our world.

My fellow parliamentarians,

To live up to the challenges of our time – particularly those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – political commitment, openness, a determination to embrace change, robust investments, and genuine care for those who place their trust in us are of paramount importance.

Let us seize the momentum created by this unique IPU Assembly to see how parliaments can contribute to rethinking the foundations of the pre-pandemic world and pave the way for a post-pandemic world that is resilient, equitable, smart, green, inclusive and fair.

A reinvigoration of our global multilateral system is one way to do this, but we must also continue to build strong and democratic national parliaments that are able to deliver for the people.

The in-person segment of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in this September will provide many of us with an opportunity to meet face to face once again.

The IPU's five-year strategy is also up for revision and every effort is being made to ensure that the views of Member Parliaments are taken into consideration at every stage of the process to adapt the IPU's work to our changing world.

I encourage you all to make the most of the IPU, particularly in these troubled times. This Organization has lived through many turbulent periods in the past century but has always stood by its primary purpose of being the global organization of national parliaments, where political dialogue, parliamentary diplomacy and cooperation can fuel the solutions for a better tomorrow.

We will do it again!

Thank you for your attention.