

IPU General Assembly, May 2021. Virtual meeting. Written statement on the general theme of the Conference “Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments” by the Portuguese Delegation to the IPU, Head of Delegation Sofia Matos, Deputy Head of Delegation Hortense Martins, Constança Urbano de Sousa, Jorge Lacão, Hugo Carneiro and Pedro do Carmo.

The Portuguese Delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union wishes to add to the voice of our colleagues in this 142nd General Assembly being held for the first time entirely via videoconference.

In early 2020, our lives were changed. We can rarely make such a statement knowing that it cuts across all of us, every country and population in the world.

We were confronted with our powerlessness in the face of an unknown virus that forced us to stop. And while some did their part by staying at home, others faced this unknown danger in hospitals, in health centres, in supermarkets, on the streets, making sure that everyone still had access to basic care and food supplies.

Technology, which already played an important role in everyone’s lives, also came to the forefront, allowing meetings that could not be held face-to-face to still take place. Online platforms started being used more regularly to reach out to citizens, and the Internet strengthened its importance as the medium that unites us all, everywhere in the world.

Parliaments, too, have been called upon to reinvent their work. The Portuguese Parliament never stopped working. Like in most other countries, plenary sittings have gone online, and their frequency has been reduced. Concerns changed their focus, and the area of health became more relevant and prominent. The role of parliaments has become even more crucial in managing the health crisis through legislation, targeted budgets, and the oversight of their governments.

The already important multilateralism is now the common language. The interdependence of countries has become evident in all areas, from the sale and distribution of surgical masks to the exchange of knowledge gained from the experience of countries that have faced the virus earlier due to various circumstances.

Unfortunately, we have all suffered many losses.

Now that the vaccines are available, we still face the challenge of distributing them, ensuring that the vaccines reach all citizens in all countries. Only then can some normalcy be regained.

Portugal understood this principle from the beginning of the pandemic. It joined efforts with other countries in the COVAX facility to guarantee everyone’s access to vaccination

regardless of their economic circumstances and has donated to some countries like Cabo Verde.

Also, we all have learned valuable lessons that cannot be lost as we move into the future.

Solidarity, multilateralism, and cooperation are now more than ever the key to a more equitable and healthier world.

Let us all work together towards such goals.