



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Genève – Suisse
www.ipu.org

Opening remarks by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Seventh Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

Virtual, 28 April 2021

Dear Mr. President of the Board of Young Parliamentarians,
Distinguished parliamentarians,
Esteemed Guests,

I am very pleased to address the seventh edition of the Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians.

Over the years, the Global Conference has become a unique platform for young parliamentarians to make it loud and clear that:

- There is no democracy without inclusion and representative participation, and
- There is no inclusion and representative participation without young people at the decision-making table.

I congratulate the Board of the Forum of Young MPs and its President for leading the strong and impactful IPU Youth Movement, a movement that drives efforts to empower youth and to promote their participation in parliament.

I strongly believe in this cause, and in the value that an intergenerational partnership can bring in this regard. I am proud to have originated this move a little over 10 years ago and to see it blossom in such a short time into a vibrant instrument for rejuvenating deliberations with the IPU.

This Conference provides a decisive avenue to reinforce this call. This is particularly important in this period when the pandemic has challenged our development model and the pillars upon which democracy rests.

Dear Colleagues,

We live in a time when the sense of urgency is overwhelming us. But we should not let urgency lead to invisibility. On the contrary, we must seize the moment and ensure that efforts to confront the pandemic, at all levels, include young people not only with their diverse voices and aspirations for a better today and a better future, but also with their capacities, talents and energies to drive change.

But in reality, the needs and interests of the younger generation are in danger of being left behind and young people are in danger of being disconnected from our institutions.

We are all collectively focusing our attention towards a better future, especially in the context of the current pandemic and the calls for building back better. The time is right for us all gathered here today to have a global conversation about paving the way for a future that is resilient, equitable, smart, green, inclusive and fair.

But there can be no better tomorrow if youth do not have a better today.

A key component of this conversation should be about placing the needs and interests of young people at the center of the efforts for a durable, resilient and equitable recovery. This is the main objective of this Conference. And we will pursue this conversation also at the upcoming 142nd IPU Assembly. Your deliberations today and tomorrow aim to shape a youth lens that will collectively be promoted and applied in the Assembly's deliberations and outcomes.

To shape up this crucial youth lens in this Conference:

- First, let's make the invisible become visible by taking stock of the impact that COVID-19 is having on young people.
- Second, let's learn from each other by uncovering good practices, virtuous measures and conducive policies to address the needs of the youth and to protect and promote their interests.
- Third, let's build on experience sharing to provide the world with a plan to build a better today and a brighter tomorrow for young men and women everywhere.

As parliamentarians - young and senior alike - you have a key role to play. You can and should place young people at the core of your efforts to channel the voices of people, shape political agendas, make policies and laws, and allocate resources.

We must invest in youth.

One key area of investment to prioritize is youth participation in parliaments. Only 2.6 per cent of the world's MPs are under 30. In 69 per cent of countries, young people can be old enough to vote, but not old enough to be elected to parliament. Far too many young men and women are disengaged from formal political processes. Eliminating barriers and implementing targeted interventions are good investments. It is a matter of rights and a matter of efficient governance.

An equally important area calling for urgent and continued investment in terms of money and attention is education. The closure of schools and universities affected more than 1.5 billion children and youth worldwide. What is most troubling is that the pandemic worsened social inequalities worldwide and left the most vulnerable youth behind as most education systems were unprepared to shift to digital learning.

Although adults and elders are significantly more vulnerable to the danger of COVID-19, I am very worried by the impact of the pandemic on the health and well-being of young people. From limited routine health services to social stress and risks of marginalization, loneliness and depression induced by lockdowns, the pandemic has isolated young people from their fundamental right to health.

A hugely important priority area is economic empowerment and employment. Young people are bearing the brunt of the current economic shocks. Our investment should not fail to lead to robust policies and measures to promote the employment of young people, create economic activities, support access to credit, loans and insurance and ensure better protection and safety nets for young men and women working in the informal sectors.

I very much look forward to seeing this Conference impact our common goal of ensuring a better today and building a better tomorrow for young men and women, and through them for the whole of society.

Thank you for your attention.