

Description of the Panels

Panel 1

Towards a new global social compact for gender equality

Gender equality is a pillar of sustainable development, peace and democracy, and a precondition for the achievement of all the SDGs. COVID-19 has eroded hard-won incremental progress worldwide in women's participation in leadership and decision-making, the economic empowerment of women, and the adoption of laws and policies aimed at the eradication of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

To build back better after COVID-19, parliaments have a paramount role to play in promoting a robust agenda for gender equality. This implies an agenda grounded on full equality between women and men in all areas of life; an agenda that not only guarantees equal opportunities on paper, but also pursues equal outcomes, benefits and services that are adapted to everyone's needs.

The panel will help identify the transformative agenda needed to promote gender equality by triggering reflections and sharing of good practices. To launch the debate, two men and two women Speakers of Parliament will be invited to share their respective reflections and experiences as well as an example of one transformative action they have undertaken or are currently undertaking to promote gender equality. Panelists will invite their peers to pledge to take similar actions in line with their respective national contexts and realities.

Guiding questions:

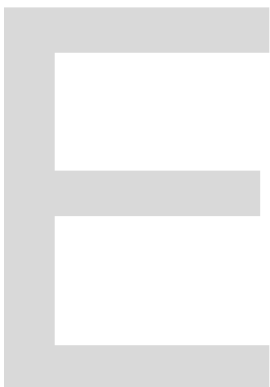
- Legal equality: What are the values that guide the legal frameworks of the community we live in? Does the law grant women and men an equal standing? If not, what needs to change?
- Economic equality: Where does the money go? Are budgetary resources benefitting all equally? What does it take to ensure that men and women have equal access to social protection and equal pay?
- Power equality: Who can speak and decide for today's and future generations? Do political processes and spaces allow for equal participation by all? What works to expand diversity in political representation?

Panel 2

Mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy

Democracies everywhere were already facing serious challenges before the COVID-19 pandemic. Those challenges have without doubt multiplied significantly in recent months. As political leaders, Speakers of Parliament have a responsibility to take action to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on democracy, and to reinforce faith in democracy.

In many countries, fundamental rights such as freedom of association were restricted during the pandemic in the name of public health imperatives. Certain jurisdictions declared a state of emergency, with further limitations on the normal functioning of democracy. Governing authorities everywhere grappled with how to ensure public consent for measures that negatively impacted people's lives and well-being.



Speakers will be invited to share their experience on the impacts of the pandemic on democracy and human rights in their country, identifying challenges, good practices and response strategies.

Guiding questions:

- What were the most significant negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy and human rights? Can any positive impacts be identified from this experience?
- Do Speakers expect the impacts to be long-lasting or short-lived?
- What measures are needed to reverse the trend and rebuild public confidence in democracy and human rights?

Panel 3

The post-pandemic recovery: Transforming the economy to combat climate change and promote sustainable development

Climate change is threatening progress on sustainable development. Key aspects of development such as access to water, food security and health are undermined by a warming climate. Unsustainable economic practices that increase greenhouse gas emissions have further worsened climate change impacts. COVID-19 has posed an additional set of challenges as countries must now also deal with the severe economic consequences of the pandemic, while also addressing climate and development challenges. Parliaments should use the recovery as an opportunity to transform economic systems so that they better support climate action and sustainable development. Speakers of Parliament will discuss and identify key parliamentary actions that can be taken to facilitate this economic transformation so that climate and development commitments linked to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs are met.

Speakers will be invited to share experiences, including both challenges and opportunities, from their own parliaments in designing and implementing both immediate and long-term sustainable economic recovery measures that help combat climate change, for example in relation to clean and renewable energy, green jobs and ecosystem protection, while also ensuring gender responsiveness and social inclusion.

Guiding questions:

- How can parliaments and parliamentarians ensure that COVID-19 recovery plans support the transition to more sustainable economic models that are aligned with climate action and sustainable development?
- What national efforts are being undertaken by parliaments to promote a 'green' recovery from the pandemic that address climate change, for example in relation to clean and renewable energy, green jobs and sustainable infrastructure?

Panel 4

Parliaments' openness, transparency and accessibility versus security: How to strike a balance?

Parliaments and MPs all over the world aim to be as accessible as possible to their electorates. Yet the more parliaments open up, the more they have to bear in mind the security risk for themselves and the institution. It is a fine balance between being as transparent and open as a parliament should be while at the same time ensuring the safety and security of its members, not just physically but also with respect to attacks on computer devices and cybercrime in general. Additionally, parliamentarians are ever more subject outside parliament to serious intimidation. The reasons are manifold and include the increasingly heated polarisation in society, the risk that parliamentary denunciation can pose to vested interests, the opportunities offered by social media platforms to spread and amplify threats and the evolving relationship between politicians and the electorate.

Speakers of Parliament will identify and discuss key parliamentary actions related to balancing access to their institutions and parliamentarians with infrastructure and human security needs. Speakers will share experiences, including both challenges and opportunities, and good practices from their own parliaments in safeguarding order and security in parliament and protecting the safety of all

parliamentarians while ensuring that the institution and its members remain accessible to the public and do not operate behind closed doors.

Guiding questions:

- When the physical security of the parliamentary premises is at risk, what should be done by parliaments to secure the buildings without, as a central institution of democracy, losing the link with the people they represent?
- How can parliaments best protect their members in the face of increasing intimidation and threats against those holding public office?
- What kind of innovative measures could parliaments implement to protect systems and people against cyberattacks that could jeopardize parliamentary democracy?

Panel 5

Parliaments and global governance: The unfinished agenda

The “parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN” was born out of the first World Conference of Speakers held at the United Nations in September 2000. That groundbreaking vision aimed to democratize global governance by adding the voices of parliaments and parliamentarians to policy processes at the UN and other international organizations. Given the legislative, budget and oversight prerogatives of parliaments, such an approach has helped translate international commitments into national realities.

Over the last twenty years, parliaments and the IPU have gained recognition at the UN as a legitimate counterpart, and parliamentarians increasingly participate in UN processes. But there is still a long way to go for parliaments to become a force to be reckoned with at the UN.

This panel will consider the practical ways and the political shifts required to deepen the role and influence of parliaments at the UN. Speakers of Parliament will identify and discuss key parliamentary actions to provide parliamentary leadership for strengthening multilateralism and global governance through the principles of dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation.

Guiding questions:

- How can parliaments effectively influence their respective government’s positions at the UN?
- What do parliaments expect of the IPU as their representative at the UN?
- In what other ways can global governance be strengthened through parliaments?