



**Address by Mr. Abdulla Shahid**  
**President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly**  
**at the Opening of the 5th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**  
Vienna, 7 September 2021

H.E. Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),  
H.E. Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the National Council of the Republic of Austria,  
H.E. Mr. Peter Ragggl, President of the Federal Council of the Republic of Austria,  
Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to join you for the 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Government of Austria for convening this conference. I would also like to commend the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Secretary-General Martin Chungong for their unwavering support to democracy and multilateralism.

Colleagues, I have the honor of having had a lengthy relationship with IPU during my five terms in the Maldivian Parliament, and the pleasure of calling Mr. Chungong a friend. It was former IPU Secretary-General Anders B. Johnsson, along with Mr. Chungong, who supported the Maldives during our transition to democracy.

As Speaker of Parliament of the Maldives, I relied upon their support during some of our most challenging periods. I have deep respect and appreciation for IPU and its team. Martin, my friend, I thank you and it is a pleasure to be here with you today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I stand before you today not as a speaker of parliament but as the President-elect of the UN General Assembly, the 'Parliament of Humanity'.

As I take on this role, I have no doubt that the lessons that I have learned as Speaker of Parliament and as a Parliamentarian will serve me well. Much like your own parliaments, the UN and multilateralism thrives on dialogue, on negotiation, and on nuance.

These elements are needed now more than ever.

Our world continues the slow but steady emergence from the global pandemic.

We however struggle to bring climate change under control.

There is growing inequality which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

While vaccines are available the distribution has been uneven.

The lockdowns in many countries have seen fall in revenues, job losses, school closures, rise in mental health and domestic violence cases, and proliferation of fake news.

The pandemic has also not given respite to the security situation in fragile states.

Clearly, there are many reasons to be cynical or pessimistic by the challenges around us.

But that is an option we cannot afford.

Billions of people look to us for signs of hope, for indications that there exists a better future. They yearn for a world that is greener, bluer, more resilient, free of conflict and hostilities, and more equal and just for all.

They look to us for hope. I say, let us give it to them.

For every challenge that we face there are solutions. The obstacle, therefore, is not the lack of solutions but our own capacity and will to do what is needed, to pursue a multilateral approach.

Let me be clear: we have only one viable path forward and that is a multilateral one.

Whether discussing COVID-19, climate change, or economic recovery, we can only go forward together. Our world is too interconnected not to address our challenges – or seize our opportunities – as one. We must learn to embrace multilateralism.

It is this need for togetherness and unity that has led me to choose ‘hope’ as the theme of the 76<sup>th</sup> session. We must give people hope for a better future. This is also the reason why my Presidency is the “Presidency of Hope”.

Ladies and gentlemen, the 76<sup>th</sup> session will prioritize five rays of hope.

First, our immediate priority will be continuing the recovery from COVID-19. Ensuring equitable access for vaccines is unparalleled in importance. Without this, we prolong the pandemic, threaten lives and livelihoods, and risk only further variants and outbreaks. It is for this reason that I plan to organize a ‘High-Level Meeting on Vaccines’ at the General Assembly before the end of the year or early next year.

Second, we need to build back better, stronger, bluer, and greener. I will use the 76<sup>th</sup> session to emphasize the need for a sustainable, transformative recovery from COVID-19. This pandemic has been a setback to the lives of billions, yet our recovery to this setback can be a turning point, allowing us to move faster and further. Let us embrace this opportunity for change and ignite progress on the “Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals”.

Third, we must respond to the needs of the planet. The recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was unequivocal in its assessment of where we are on this issue. We must act quickly if we are to limit the climate impacts. For my part, I will convene a ‘High-Level Meeting on Climate’ in October 2021. It is my hope that this effort will help inspire greater climate ambition from Member States ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.

Relatedly, we will have other significant events in the coming year on the environment, covering the ocean; desertification, land degradation and drought; and biodiversity. We must use each of these moments to push for ever more action. To fully utilize the impetus generated by these events, it is my intention to hold a ‘super session on nature’ during the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the UNGA. My hope is that this super session will galvanize the required political momentum to advance global climate goals.

Fourth, we must continue to promote and protect human rights, and address inequalities and injustices. The protection of human rights is one of the core values of the United Nations. We need to work together to counter the rising tide of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and all other forms of discrimination.

As a life-long supporter of gender equality, I will focus on the empowerment of women, ensuring their full, equal, and meaningful representation. My cabinet is gender balanced and I have been vocal about my intention to only participate in panels or discussions that reflect gender parity. I hope you will join me in espousing these principles.

And finally, we need to continue our efforts to empower and reform the United Nations. Building on the work of my predecessors, I will continue to make the United Nations more efficient, effective, accountable and even family friendly. I will work with Member States to ensure that our decisions, discussions, and actions are relevant and impactful to the people of the world. We need to bring the United Nations closer to the people.

Ladies and gentlemen, parliaments are necessary partners for each of these rays of hope. Whether it is in ensuring access to vaccines, recovering sustainably from the pandemic, or tackling the threat of climate change, the UN cannot act alone, we need to work with our partners in parliament.

Parliaments represent the voice of the people. Parliaments help ensure that resolutions and decisions in the General Assembly are passed onto the national and local stage and translated into concrete deliverables that people can see and feel. This is how we bring together the work of the UN to people everywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have had a challenging period to say the least. We must look forward together. We must shape our joint future together. I look forward to working with you to making this a reality.

Let the Parliaments of the world unite in our joint endeavor for a better future.

I thank you again for the opportunity to speak.