



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech from Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Global Ethics Forum 2024, Ethical Leadership for a Re-envisioned Future

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Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe previous speakers have already addressed protocol on matters, and so I will just acknowledge the presence of all those dignitaries and all the participants here today.

I have been given the honour to deliver the keynote address at this year's Global Ethics Forum. I feel very humbled by this privilege when I look at the title of this year's Forum. It could not be more appropriate. We are seeking to address ethical leadership in a re-envisioned future. I salute those who designed this program because many of us global leaders tend to behave like there is no future and we are seen to be ineffective in delivering on the challenges facing the global community today.

The designers of the program have adequately explained that there is no paucity of challenges facing the global community today. We have conflicts raging around the world. We have the existential threat of climate change. We have the emergence of new technologies, including AI that is at once a source of hope and a source of concern for many of us, because it is fraught with a lot of uncertainties.

Therefore, I believe the minds of the framers of this meeting, they wanted us to re-envision a different world from how we know it today. That world would require a new way of thinking, so that some of those mechanisms that we have in place today cannot be called into question.

I have no doubt that multilateralism will continue to be at the forefront of the global response to the challenges facing us. It is not a question of saying that you do away with multilateralism. That would be like throwing out the bathwater with the baby. We need to see how we can reframe multilateralism so that it can be more effective, legitimate and more relevant to the needs of the people.

In fact, when the United Nations was created in 1945, the reality was, of course, the same: you had conflict, we needed to resolve conflict. There were some stakeholders who were limited in number, but today we have the emergence of many other stakeholders, which I think should be included in our multilateral mechanisms.

Today, I speak to you in my capacity as Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global organization of parliaments across the world, representing 180 national parliaments. The experience that I will be sharing with you will be reflective of what I have seen over the years as head of this organization in terms of the position of parliaments and parliamentarians.

For me, leadership, including ethical leadership, goes to the very mandate of parliamentarians and parliaments. Parliamentarians are the representatives of the people and they have to have the moral weight to represent the people and deliver on their expectations. That is what we at the Inter-Parliamentary Union are trying to do: identify what parliaments and parliamentarians need to do, but also strengthen their capacity to do just that. Because we cannot assume that parliaments will display those skills and capacity that are required to deliver on the mandate entrusted to them by the people.

We try to promote dialogue. It is important that we no longer see parliaments and parliamentarians living in a bubble or ivory tower, oblivious to what is happening around them. Ethical leadership should be one

that is promoting dialogue, promoting conversations between political leaders and other leaders across our society, with a view to inclusive and legitimate outcomes.

The moral values that Globethics articulates are very much aligned with those that the IPU is promoting, namely inclusivity, equality, respect, integrity and solidarity. These are all qualities that we need to display as leaders today.

That is why, at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, we have developed the *ecosystem* approach, which means that we no longer see parliaments or parliamentarians as self-contained institutions, oblivious to what is happening around them. They have to reach out to all of society if they want to reflect the views of all of society. They have to reach out to experts, civil society, professionals, academics, all people who can contribute to enriching decision-making. Inclusivity of approach, integration of approach, is something that we think is inherent in ethical and, I hasten to say, more effective leadership.

I am very happy to see that this year's Forum is casting a broad net, addressing peace, sustainability, responsible governance, and the digital revolution, with a focus on intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Who could question the rationale of this approach when we look at what the world is going through and the victims of the challenges that we are looking at in the world today?

Ladies and gentlemen, I think that the primary duty of parliamentarians is to represent citizens. That does not mean they have just to come and sit in a room and say they are representatives of the people. They have to think and act on behalf of the people. They have to take decisions that make a positive impact on the lives of the people.

A lot has been said about democracy and strong parliaments around the world. These are at best abstract notions. They only have a meaning if democracy, human rights and the rule of law all translate into better well-being for the people. This is therefore something that I believe parliamentarians should be articulating. That is the meaning of representation of the people.

Ethical leadership must address the issue of trust. Our global community is facing a breach of trust. There is a disconnect between the governors and the governed because the governors are not being seen as being able to address the concerns of the people. We look at our global institutions, our multi-lateral institutions – they are not trusted anymore because despite the existence of the IPU and the United Nations, the war is raging in Gaza, the war is raging in Ukraine.

We are yet to find solutions to this, which therefore means that we have to step up the game. It is not that we lack the mechanisms. The mechanisms are there. We need just to rededicate ourselves to implementing those mechanisms with a lot of devotion.

I am the first to acknowledge that Parliamentarians are not in the good books of society. I think you made that point, Dr. Fadi Daou, last year when we met in Marrakesh, that when you look at the ladder of public confidence, politicians are at the bottom, including parliamentarians. I agree with you entirely because they are not seen to be serving the interests of the people. They are self-serving, they consider leadership as a right and not as a privilege to serve humanity. Therefore, it is important for us to be mindful of this aspect.

For us to restore trust in the legitimacy of leaders, including parliamentary leaders, we need to go back to what we mean by democracy. For us, democracy means the existence of strong parliaments, and strong parliaments need to be representative for society. They need to be transparent in the way they operate. They need to be accountable to the people. You do not go and see the people just when you have to be elected and then you forget them. Parliamentarians need to be accessible to the people, and they have to be effective on delivering. These are things that we all share and which we can prosecute in a more, I would say, stringent manner.

I made reference to science and technology, including innovation. This area is emerging strongly and is fraught with a lot of concern. AI, for instance, has the potential to move us into a much better future. However, it also holds the potential to annihilate humanity. It is therefore important that effective or ethical leaders address the issue of artificial intelligence, identifying those potentials that are positive in their outcome and also seeking to address the concerns, the doubts and the positive or negative effects of artificial intelligence. That is what we at the Inter-Parliamentary Union are doing, looking at how artificial intelligence can impact democracy.

In addition, we want to see how we can establish linkages between the world of policy making, the world of politics, and the scientific community. That is why the experience of the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA), resonates so well with us: in our era of ethical leadership, political leaders must be taking decisions on the basis of clear scientific evidence and not just on speculations. Therefore, I encourage us and the global community to engage more with the scientific community.

In the IPU, we are in the process of adopting a *Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology*. We want parliaments to be at the forefront of the global community in terms of harnessing the positive potential of scientific and technological innovation. Later this year, we will be coming up with these guidelines on how Parliaments can address the various challenges that come with scientific and technological innovation.

I believe previous speakers have talked about inclusiveness in terms of including different stakeholders in the policy-making context. A lot has been said about gender equality, about intergenerational dialogue and the involvement of young people. If I may, for a few seconds, put on my hat as chair of the Global Board of International Gender Champions, I want to say how important, professionally and personally for me, gender equality is.

You cannot have effective, ethical leadership without the equitable participation of both men and women in decision-making processes. That is not currently the case. Our data shows that women account for just 27 percent of parliamentary membership. That is not enough. Why shouldn't we have 50 percent women parliamentarians and 50 percent men parliamentarians? Because that is the relative ratio of society in general. We want to fight for more gender equality, not only in terms of numbers. Women should be able to be given positions where they can make a difference in decision-making.

We need also to address those concerns and challenges facing women who go into politics. There is data that, across the world, women politicians are more likely to be victims of gender-based violence on account of their involvement in politics, than men. Therefore, we need to address this head on. It is not a good thing for women to be victimized because of political ambition.

I would like to say the same thing for young generations. I was in Salzburg a few days ago, and we were talking about the future of Europe in an uncertain world. One of the things that we are keen to point out is that it is no longer right to say that young people are the leaders of tomorrow. They are the leaders of today. They have to contribute to decisions that will govern society over future generations. We do not have to wait for them to be leaders in order to take those decisions. That is very important for us.

When you look at the global statistics, 60 percent of society in general is made up of people under 30 years of age. Do you know what percentage of that age bracket is represented in Parliament? It is appalling: under three percent. Less than three percent of young people under the age of 30 are represented in those institutions that are supposed to be making decisions and policies that govern their future. Therefore, we have come up with this campaign called, "*I say Yes to Youth in Parliament!*". Leaders across the world, including heads of State, are signing up to this campaign in order to bring more young people in the mainstream of policymaking decision.

Let me use this opportunity to say a few words about our partners. We are pleased to count Globethics among our knowledge partners, and we did appreciate, Fadi, your interventions last year, during the first-ever *Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue*, which took place in Marrakesh.

I think this speaks to the need to reach out to multiple stakeholders. People may say politicians and religious leaders coming together constitutes an unholy alliance. However, that is not true. They have mandates that overlap and resonate very well with society. We were pleased that the dialogue that took place between parliamentary leaders and religious scholars and others was very fruitful to the extent that today there are calls for more such encounters. We are set to organize a major conference in Rome, in the context of the Catholic Church's Jubilee next year. We think that inclusiveness is the name of the game, so we cannot have any leadership that is exclusive or divisive.

I would like to conclude by offering a few thoughts about ethical leadership. First of all, I think an ethical leader should be listening and not just hearing. Ethical leaders must listen, which means that they should dedicate themselves to understanding the concerns of their interlocutors instead of just using their ears.

Ethical leadership has to be compassionate and equitable. I think it was Madame Fontanet [President of the State Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva] who said that we cannot not limit ourselves to just technical solutions. They have to be equitable, they have to be fair to the people.

Moreover, ethical leaders need to see and not just look. We need to see the personality behind Ambassador Da Silva, the personality behind President Stuckelberger and anybody else here – otherwise you just have physical appearance – and factor this into their decision.

Ethical leadership requires that politicians and others speak out against injustice and speak up for the marginalized.

Ethical leadership is steeped in the common interest over and above individual parochial interests. The moral compass has to be clearly re-established, which means that politicians and other leaders must take decisions in the common interest and not be selfish or egoistic in their approach.

Ethical leadership should be transparent. It should be accountable. It should fight morally reprehensible actions such as corruption. Ethical leadership has no place for populism, for hate speech, for divisive speech. Ethical leadership should be rallying all of society to tackle the problems and challenges facing all of society.

Lastly, ethical leadership should be people-centred, which means that as leaders we should always ask the question: in what way are my decisions or actions beneficial or negative to the interests of the people? If we cannot have clear-cut answers to this question, then we are required to think twice.

I will just conclude with those words to say that it is not a question of a lack or shortage of moral values and principles. What we need to do in the context of efficient or ethical leadership is to rise to those values and principles that are universally recognized: human rights, the rule of law, equity, equality and others.

For me, ethical leadership is just that we need to step up the game, otherwise we will not be deserving of the trust that the people have entrusted to leaders such as ourselves, parliamentarians, and those sitting in this room.

Thank you very much for your attention.