



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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T +41 22 919 41 50  
F +41 22 919 41 60  
E [postbox@ipu.org](mailto:postbox@ipu.org)  
[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland

# Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

## 2025 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations – Closing remarks

New York, 14 February 2025

Dear Colleagues,

This is my second annual hearing as President, and I am most impressed.

We had a great turnout - about 180 parliamentarians from 60 parliaments - and each session generated a lot of thoughtful questions and comments. The presenters were all of the highest caliber.

Aside from the President of the General Assembly as co-sponsor, the UN presence included several high level officials, including the Under-Secretary-General for Policy, Mr. Guy Ryder, who functions as a principal advisor to Mr. Guterrez, the Secretary General.

I want to thank in particular the moderator, Dan Dunskey, for his terrific job keeping the discussion flowing and connecting the dots in the conversation between presenters and participants.

Dan, please keep your schedule open for next year's hearing!

I also appreciated the initial survey exercise that got everyone actively engaged in the issues from the very beginning, as well as the way the many sessions over the two days were combined to create a coherent thematic whole. This formula allowed us to explore a lot of ground together, examining many trees in close proximity *without* missing the forest.

Right now, in this short time, I just want to highlight a few messages from the meeting that I would like you to take home while we work on the summary report.

The premise of the whole discussion was aptly put by Professor Sachs, when he said: "all of these challenges are human made, therefore they are human solvable."

The SDGs are not an impossible task and we can succeed if we put our hearts and minds to it.

As one presenter noted, in almost no time the international community was able to raise some 7 trillion dollars in response to the economic crisis caused by the Covid pandemic. What prevents us from making the same effort for the SDGs in the next five years?

While people at large may not be familiar with the SDGs proper, they know their own problems well: they want health care, education, economic opportunity, a clean environment and so forth. It is up to parliamentarians to translate those aspirations into the language of the SDGs and to push for the adoption and implementation of SDG national plans through laws and budgets.

We heard of the difficulty of advancing all of the SDGs at once.

Clearly many countries need to prioritize so that they can get more done by the 2030 deadline. Some people even suggested that after 2030, whether the SDGs continue as they are or are replaced by a new set of goals, there should be a staggered timeline for the various goals instead of a single deadline for the whole framework.

When it comes to the issues of SDGs finance that were at the heart of this meeting, what came across most strongly is how completely interlinked they are.

Domestic revenues, aid, debt, trade, and private investments: none of these alone will suffice to finance the SDGs, but taken together they can get the job done. Each country needs to find its own mix. There is no set formula. Most obviously though, taxes, trade and investments deserve particular attention because they are more stable and reliable than aid and borrowed money.

Another message that came across most clearly is about the need for stronger parliamentary oversight in all these areas.

Parliaments need to push for more transparency in trade agreements, as well as in the conditions attached to loan, aid and investment agreements.

Who gets to write those agreements and for whom is key. We can't leave it to big transnational actors to dictate the agenda. We need to revisit those agreements so that they are more people-centered and development-driven.

Parliaments need to partner more closely with civil society organizations and more generally include all citizens in policy debates about SDGs finance. Everywhere people need more opportunities to engage in these issues so that solutions are designed from the start to benefit the whole of society.

Yet another message I retain from the meeting is this: let's think creatively about these issues, unafraid of innovation and experimentation. At the same time, be careful not to fall for the latest fad. Some old recipes may have failed because they were always wrong, or simply not workable in today's context; but other prescriptions may have failed simply because we didn't try hard enough. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

The best illustration of this came from the discussion about foreign aid, where there is a clear fatigue on both sides, donors and recipients, and where fresh thinking is badly needed.

Some of you also urged a re-thinking of GDP as the main metric of development that also serves as a baseline for debt negotiations. On all these points we heard lots of great ideas to help us move us forward.

Many speakers emphasized the role of the UN as a key convener.

When all else fails, it is the UN that people look to for guidance. This was made evident, for example, in the suggestion that a debt workout mechanism needs to be managed directly under UN auspices.

Multilateral solutions are often the only ones workable, and I am glad that most of you said as much in yesterday's survey. A good illustration of this came from the discussion on global taxation when someone noted that wealth taxes cannot be implemented by a single country alone simply because wealth can move to low tax jurisdictions.

We must continue to make the case for multilateralism despite some governments insisting on going their own way. The idea that the national interest cannot be reconciled with the global common good is just wrong. It takes effort, but it can be done. This is why we have institutions like the UN, the WTO, the IMF and others as conveners and rule-setters.

Finally, this meeting impressed on me once again the critical importance of good governance in all aspects of development, including finance.

Low trust in government was cited many times as a huge issue. We saw this for example in the discussion about taxation: people do not trust a system that favors the richest in our societies with relatively low tax rates as well as all sorts of loopholes and subsidies. Restoring fairness in taxation will go a long way in restoring trust in government.

Colleagues,

To conclude, let me remind you that this meeting is our main contribution to the 4th UN conference on financing for development that will take place in June in Spain. The summary report of the meeting will be circulated to all member States.

As we heard, the zero draft outcome document of the conference contains several references to the oversight role of parliament. Our office here will keep an eye on the on-going negotiation. But you need to do your part too: when you return home, ask the minister for a briefing and demand to review the draft document that is on the table to make sure that all references to parliaments are retained.

Just as important, make sure that the various issues on the agenda are debated in the relevant committees and recommendations presented to your government before a final agreement is reached.

We will share information about this process with all members of the IPU with a view to facilitating the inclusion of parliamentarians in the national delegations to the conference. I hope many of you will be able to join.

Thank you so much.