



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech of Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

UNGSII SDG Lab “SDG10: Leaving No One Behind”
Session – Democracy Campus and Freedom Index 2024

Davos, 20 January 2025

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to join you today at this important event. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to UNGSII for hosting this event, and for its leadership in spotlighting the situation of young people, when speaking about leaving no one behind in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. This is something that also lies at the very heart of the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s vision and work.

As you may know, the IPU is the global organization of national parliaments. We represent 181 national parliaments and over 90% of the world’s population. Founded in 1889, we work to promote peace, democracy and sustainable development through parliamentary diplomacy, cooperation and action. I am proud to say that youth political participation is one of our strategic priorities, alongside sustainable development, climate change, democratic governance, human rights, and gender equality.

As you are all well aware, the world faces a multitude of unprecedented challenges. The planet is warming, inequality is growing, and we face grave human rights challenges in an increasingly polarized world. The SDGs serve as a common reference point—a blueprint for all countries to tackle these issues and build a better future. But they are more than a shared agenda, they are a promise to future generations. With only five years to go until 2030, unfortunately, we are well behind where we need to be. Only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, and over one-third have stalled or are regressing.

We do not have time to wait. We need to act now, act quickly, and act decisively.

To attain these goals, bold leadership, innovative solutions, and, most importantly, an “all hands on deck” approach, are required.

Parliaments are engines to address precisely these needs. Being at the heart of political decision-making and democratic governance, they are indispensable actors in achieving the SDGs.

Parliaments are:

- where the laws needed to implement this common agenda are adopted;
- where the budgets that finance sustainable development are passed;
- where oversight takes place, and governments are monitored and held to account for the commitments they make;
- and, perhaps most importantly, parliaments are the place where the people, in all their diversity, are represented, and able to participate in the decision-making process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When parliaments represent the diversity of the people they serve, they can drive change that is not only effective, but enduring. However, when groups are left out, it is not only the democratic rights of people that are damaged, but our own political outcomes. When we leave people out, we are also excluding their knowledge, ideas and solutions.

One of the groups that are too often sidelined are young people. Despite more than half the world being under 30 years of age, only 2.8% of the world's MPs are under 30. 39% of parliaments have no MPs under 30. And in 70% of chambers, young people old enough to vote must face a waiting period until they are allowed to run for office.

Let us remember: it is today's youth and future generations who will benefit from our successes in achieving the SDGs—or bear the consequences of our failures. For this reason alone, they have a right to be represented at the decision-making table.

However, more than that, young people have so much to offer in developing solutions to the critical problems we face. We see their tireless energy when it comes to climate activism. We benefit from their ingenuity and innovation when it comes to technology. If young people can be the CEOs of the world's biggest tech companies, they can also take leadership positions in our political institutions.

Youth political participation is, therefore, not only a right that must be fulfilled, but one of the smartest investments we can make in our common future.

I am proud that the IPU, and its Member Parliaments, have recognized the promise of young people and have committed to bold action. In 2010, our parliaments adopted a resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. This led to the creation of an IPU youth movement and a series of actions:

- The IPU created a Forum of Young Parliamentarians in 2014. It is now regarded as *the* meeting place for the world's young MPs;
- We organize the annual Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, which has become a signature event bringing together young MPs, the United Nations, youth groups, and many other stakeholders to coordinate solutions on key issues;
- We are also the global observatory for data and information on youth in parliament, tracking ages of MPs, and good practices relating to youth around the world. This data is part of the official tracking of SDG progress;
- We also provide technical support to parliaments to further empower young people and young MPs. This includes support for legislative changes and training courses to help young MPs not only participate, but be leaders in their parliaments;
- And to mobilize more political will, we have launched the global "I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!" campaign, which is dedicated to triggering concrete change through the implementation of measures deemed most impactful to boost youth participation by young MPs themselves. This includes:
 - o Adopting youth quotas, so that more young people are guaranteed seats at the decision-making table;
 - o Lowering the age of eligibility to run for office so it is aligned with the age to vote. If you are old enough to pay taxes, or serve in the military, you should not be too young to run for office;
 - o Creating youth channels in parliament, such as committees and networks;
 - o Empowering young MPs to leadership roles; and
 - o Mentoring young aspirants, to empower the next generation of youth leaders.

These bold actions are essential for achieving the transformative change needed to place young people at the forefront of delivering the SDGs and enhancing our democracies. I am pleased that, since we launched this campaign, nearly 2000 people have signed up, including almost 900 MPs from over 150 countries and over 70 Speakers of Parliament. Many of the changemakers that have signed up have walked the talk and brought about concrete changes. This includes legal reforms so younger people can run for political office, and the creation of new parliamentary bodies to empower youth.

Despite all these successes, we know that much work remains to be done. In an era of increasing political distrust and democratic backsliding, strengthening the link between young people and their political institutions has never been more urgent. This is why creating channels for engagement with young people has been a priority for the IPU's young MPs in recent years. At its last meeting, the Forum of Young Parliamentarians celebrated its tenth anniversary by holding its first *Open session* with grassroots youth representatives and students to discuss their concerns, aspirations and potential solutions.

I believe it is this same spirit that inspires the work of the UNGSII. I commend the visionary initiative of creating the Global Youth Poll. Providing young people with channels to voice their priorities and perspectives is essential for the future of our democracies and societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, the call to action is clear: we must redouble our efforts to empower youth as partners in achieving the SDGs and strengthening our democracies. The stakes are too high, and the timelines too short, to proceed with business as usual. Together, we can unlock the full potential that youth can draw upon in order to create a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

The parliamentary community is a key partner for you to help realize the future that we all want, and that our children and future generations deserve. The IPU stands ready to collaborate with you to turn this vision into reality.

Thank you.