



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Conference on child rights and digital environment, including AI: Challenges and opportunities for children

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I sincerely thank you, Professor Tavkheldze, for your kind invitation to this important event. Regrettably, prior commitments prevent me from attending in person, but I extend my best wishes for productive discussions.

The topic of this conference is both timely and critical. Digital technology is transforming our world, shaping economies, societies, and particularly the lives of children. While it offers extraordinary opportunities for learning, communication, and development, it also presents significant risks. As we embrace the digital age, we must ensure that children's rights are fully protected and upheld.

Parliaments play a key role in this endeavour. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has long championed children's rights, working with partners such as UNICEF and the Committee on the Rights of the Child to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our efforts include mobilising parliaments for legislative action, policy advocacy, and capacity-building to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in safeguarding children's rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Digital technology is now an integral part of childhood, with one in three internet users globally being under 18. As highlighted in General Comment 25 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the digital environment should support children's development while ensuring their protection from harm. Parliamentarians must ensure that national policies and laws align with this vision by:

- Closing the digital divide – More than 2.6 billion people remain offline, many of them children. Parliamentarians must advocate for universal and equitable digital access, ensuring that all children, regardless of geography or socio-economic background, can benefit from the digital revolution.
- Strengthening digital literacy – Digital skills are essential for navigating the online world safely. Parliaments should support initiatives that promote digital education for children, parents, and educators, ensuring responsible and informed digital engagement.
- Regulating AI and digital platforms – While ongoing discussions among international bodies highlight both the potential and risks of AI, there is a pressing need to address concerns such as bias, surveillance, and online harm. Parliaments must enact clear, enforceable safeguards to ensure AI systems uphold children's rights
While digital technology provides many benefits, it also exposes children to significant risks: harmful content, cyberbullying, exploitation, and privacy violations. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, including:

- Developing child-centric online policies – Governments and digital platforms must adopt strong privacy protections, age-appropriate content policies, and mechanisms to prevent online abuse.
- Promoting digital accountability – Companies should be required to conduct child impact assessments on AI and digital services. Parliamentarians should oversee compliance with these safeguards.
- Supporting global cooperation – Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between parliaments, governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. This conference exemplifies such collaboration by bringing together key stakeholders to foster collective solutions. The IPU stands ready to work with its partners to advance these efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recognizing the critical role of parliaments in shaping policies that safeguard children's rights in the digital age, the IPU is committed to working with its Member Parliaments in the following areas:

1. Enhancing legislative frameworks to uphold children's rights in the digital space.
2. Investing in digital literacy programs to equip children, parents, and educators with the skills needed for safe online engagement.
3. Strengthening international cooperation to bridge the digital divide and promote equitable access to technology.
4. Holding digital platforms accountable for ensuring a safe, child-friendly digital environment.
5. Engaging civil society and young people in shaping digital policies that reflect their needs and concerns.

The IPU reaffirms its commitment to supporting parliaments in their endeavours to establish a digital environment that upholds the rights and well-being of children. Furthermore, the IPU is willing to work with other stakeholders to achieve this shared objective.

I welcome in particular the initiative of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop a Joint Statement on AI and child rights and confirm the IPU's intention to contribute fully to this endeavour.

In a resolution on AI and democracy in October last year, the IPU called for increased international multi-stakeholder cooperation, collaboration, and exchange of information and experiences to ensure a united worldwide effort to maximize the benefits of AI, while mitigating risks to humanity, including through initiatives designed to reduce disparities in technological development between nations.

We see the great potential for AI to support the realization of children's rights, including the rights to education and health, among others. We see equally clearly some of the risks, most visibly the way in which AI may increase the risk of online harms to children. Parliaments have a central role in defining the legislative frameworks around child rights and AI. I believe that this Joint Statement will provide important guidance for parliaments, as for other stakeholders.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful discussion.