



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

Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly Global Parliamentary Dialogue
Opening session

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Dear Mr. Director-General, my dear brother, Tedros,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both a pleasure and an honour to open this parliamentary dialogue with my friend and brother, Dr. Tedros. I commend his leadership over the past years in recognizing the key role that parliaments play in health in opening a space at the World Health Assembly for this important gathering.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union brings together 181 national parliaments to strengthen democratic governance and institutions. So why do we think health is so important? In our view, health is not just a sectoral issue—it is a foundation for dignity, equity, and sustainable development. And yet, in every context, health inequalities persist. These inequalities remain one of the most significant obstacles to progress across sectors.

The reality is stark: those who are already vulnerable continue to face the greatest barriers to accessing the care they need. These barriers are further compounded by the rising tide of misinformation and disinformation, as well as backlash on women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights, which distort facts, erode public trust, and limit access to care and services.

In this context, evidence must remain our compass. Sound, scientific evidence is the cornerstone of effective policymaking and the bedrock of laws that truly serve people. Our long-standing partnership with WHO is promoting an evidence-based culture in parliaments, bringing the scientific and the parliamentary communities closer together.

But evidence alone is not enough. We also need trust. Trust between citizens and their governments. Trust between policymakers, health workers, and communities. Trust across borders and across regions. Building and sustaining trust must be a priority—rooted in transparency, participation, and above all, a commitment to human rights.

Indeed, health is a human right. That principle must guide all of our actions, from the drafting of legislation to the design and delivery of services. When health policies are grounded in human rights, they are not only more just—they are more effective, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

This is what makes today's dialogue so important. We are here to exchange and to forge stronger connections between global commitments and national realities.

This World Health Assembly is marking history with the Pandemic Agreement. Dr. Tedros, let me commend you and your team on such a tremendous achievement. The IPU and WHO have been deploying strenuous efforts to raise awareness among parliamentarians throughout the negotiations to pave the way for ratification and implementation. Now that we have a treaty, we need to work together on a roadmap for robust parliamentary engagement with a view to speedy ratification and entry into force of this key instrument. The Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in late July and the 152nd Assembly of the IPU in October—both in Geneva—are key moments for us to jointly articulate this agenda.

We are also here to reaffirm the importance of multilateral institutions and their sustainability, at a critical time when decreasing funding for global health and aid cuts are shifting the global health funding landscape dramatically.

Parliaments play a unique and vital role in addressing and mitigating these challenges. As the interface between citizens and the state, between global declarations and local implementation, strong parliamentary institutions can be powerful agents of change. But to fulfil that role, parliaments must be meaningfully engaged. Engaged as partners and as advocates who bring the voices and perspectives of communities into national and global processes.

Let this meeting be a step toward that engagement. Together, let us reaffirm our shared commitment to health, to equity, and to human rights.

Thank you.