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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 Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

GCTP-UNHCR High-Level Roundtable  
Empowering Refugees Through Policy, Education, Innovation, and Inclusion

28 May 2025

Madam Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees,  
Mr. President of the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,

Allow me to begin by thanking the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace and UNHCR for convening this important high-level roundtable, and for inviting the Inter-Parliamentary Union – the world organization of Parliaments – to take part.

I should note that I am very pleased to address you today, not only on behalf of the IPU, but also in my capacity as Chair of the Global Board of the International Gender Champions — a leadership network committed to breaking down gender barriers and advancing gender equality across all sectors.

Colleagues,

Forced displacement is one of the greatest challenges of our time. It has been estimated that by June 2024, **over 122 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide** due to conflict, persecution and human rights violations. According to UNHCR, the number of people remaining forcibly displaced has not stopped growing for more than 12 years. Behind each number is a person facing profound exclusion: exclusion from their home, from their country, from legal protections, from their own development, and from the full promise of a dignified life.

Addressing this is not only a humanitarian obligation; protecting refugees and facilitating their inclusion and empowerment is a human rights imperative. It is also the smart and, dare I say, the only thing to do. While the vulnerability of displaced populations is a major concern, efforts to facilitate their inclusion and build their autonomy have proven to be a powerful way to alleviate the impact of these dramatic situations both on those that have left everything behind as well as on the communities that host them.

But of course, this is easier said than done. Progress can only happen with political will, inclusive decision-making, partnerships and understanding.

This is where parliaments and parliamentarians come in. Through legislation, parliaments can establish legal status for refugees, enshrine access to services, and align national laws with international human rights obligations. This includes the right to education — a fundamental right and one of the most powerful tools for inclusion and empowerment. Parliaments also play an essential role in ensuring effective implementation of these commitments, such as by monitoring the impact of laws and approving budgets aimed at supporting refugee education.

In 2024, around 7.2 million refugee children were missing out on an education – nearly half of all school-aged refugee children worldwide. For girls, children with disabilities and stateless youth, the barriers are even greater – including cultural norms, insecurity and lack of facilities. Parliamentary action is needed to ensure national education systems are not only inclusive and adequately resourced, but also gender-sensitive and trauma-informed, enabling displaced children to learn, grow and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Parliaments can also promote innovation — from digital learning and mobile documentation to scalable, inclusive technologies that improve refugee access to services and autonomy. Supporting female-led innovation and entrepreneurship in refugee communities is particularly important to foster self-reliance and long-term resilience.

In addition, parliamentarians, as opinion leaders, have the power and responsibility to challenge misinformation and intolerance, counter xenophobia, and promote peaceful coexistence and inclusion. In doing so, they help build more cohesive and resilient societies that value and benefit from the diversity that refugees bring.

Progress cannot be achieved by one entity alone. It requires a whole-of-society approach in which all stakeholders play their role and partner together. Parliaments, as representative institutions, are spaces to integrate the perspectives of many of the voices gathered here today, including UN bodies, faith leaders, academia and civil society, to ensure that their work is inclusive and benefits from diverse perspectives and expertise.

With that in mind, I believe that the Global Compact on Refugees should continue to guide our action, as it seeks to bring comprehensive and sustainable solutions to the plight of refugees through equitable responsibility-sharing and international cooperation. The IPU has been working closely with UNHCR for over 20 years to raise awareness and support parliaments and parliamentarians with their work on refugee protection and inclusion. We recognize that the inclusion and empowerment of refugees are integral to achieving sustainable peace — peace grounded in justice, participation and respect for human rights.

Through robust legislation, inclusive policies and global solidarity, parliaments can help transform our response to refugees from exclusion to empowerment — and ensure that no one, regardless of gender or circumstance, is left behind.

Thank you.