

Reports on the panels

Panel 1

The first panel was on the theme *Women's and youth participation in parliament in a time of polarization and adversity*. It was moderated by Ms. Rana Sidani, former Spokesperson for the WHO, IFRC and ICRC.

Panellists:

- **Ms. Cynthia López Castro** (Mexico), President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, member of the 15SWSP Preparatory Committee
- **Mr. Felipe Paullier**, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs
- **Ms. Gabriella Morawska-Stanecka** (Poland), Senator, Vice-President of the IPU
- **Ms. Diana Lutta** representing **Ms. Sofia Calltorp**, Director, UN Women Geneva Office and UN Women's Chief of Humanitarian Action
- **Mr. Wessel van der Berg**, Senior Advocacy Officer, Equipundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice

The panel emphasized that, despite some progress in increasing the representation of women and youth in parliaments, the pace of change remained slow. As of 2025, women make up only 27.2% of members of parliament worldwide, and a mere 2.8% of MPs are 30 years of age and under, even though half the global population is under 30. It was pointed out that exclusion could lead to an erosion of trust, and common and persistent challenges to achieving fully inclusive parliaments were highlighted. Those challenges included the deepening of polarization in the political landscape and a global pushback on women's rights. As a result, rising political violence – both online and offline – tended to target women, youth and people from diverse backgrounds disproportionately. Legislative barriers preventing young people old enough to vote from running for office were also highlighted.

While gender parity and equitable representation of youth were key, for diverse voices to fully contribute, lead and influence, representation must go beyond numbers in chambers and effective power and leadership positions must also go to youth and women. Panellists also suggested that parliaments could create or strengthen context-specific mechanisms to build inter-generational dialogue in their countries, which in turn could lead to bridge-building in a time of polarization.

Panellists and Speakers participating in the debate called for action in three key areas. First, adopting strong laws and policies such as gender and youth quotas could have positive impacts at the national level, as in the case of Rwanda and Timor-Leste. A review of the electoral system, along with the democratization of candidate selections and the removal of party-level barriers, could be complimentary steps in levelling the playing field. Women's and youth commissions and caucuses within parliaments were valuable initiatives to amplify women's and youth voices.

Secondly, an environment that was enabling for women and youth to participate and lead in must be created. With misogynistic comments and harassment inhibiting participation, special protection for women MPs in the United Kingdom and specific laws such as those in Mexico could help to combat gender-based political violence. Speakers also showcased efforts to drive gender-sensitive parliaments in line with the IPU's 2012 Plan of Action. That included initiatives to shift gender norms such as valuing the role of male MPs as fathers through "dads' caucuses" and promoting shared care responsibilities through internal parliamentary policies. To ensure that decision-making was shared, women and youth needed to be in high-level positions – such as Speakers, and included in decision-making processes by leading committees on finance, budgets and defence.

The third action focused on transforming mindsets through public outreach and awareness-raising. Parliaments not only had a key role but also held responsibility for leading a cultural shift away from male-dominated political environments, and ones that excluded youth. Various initiatives that were already underway were mentioned, such as the expansion of civic education through parliamentary open days, and women's and youth mock parliaments in Fiji, Slovakia and Sri Lanka.

As one Speaker put it, an inclusive parliament was not a luxury nor a favour. It was a matter of justice, and a precondition for peace and prosperity for all. A lot more remained to be done towards achieving gender parity and the equitable participation of youth in parliaments. In a time of increased polarization and pushback on women's rights and on core democratic values, it was agreed that parliamentarians had a collective responsibility to build a new path for societies, and engage all generations in decision-making.

Panel 2

The second panel was on the theme *Innovating for a peaceful future, crafting new solutions for a turbulent world*. It was moderated by Ms. Rana Sidani, former Spokesperson for the WHO, IFRC and ICRC.

Panellists:

- **Ms. Kandia Kamissoko Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire), President of the Senate, former Foreign Minister
- **Mr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi** (United Arab Emirates), Member of the Federal National Council (FNC), Chair of the Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs Committees
- **Ms. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini**, Founder & CEO, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN).
- **Mr. Zachary Paikin**, Deputy Director, Better Order Project, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

Ms. K. Kamissoko Camara (Côte d'Ivoire) shared her country's experience in rebuilding peace through inclusive dialogue, national reconciliation and equitable development, underscoring the importance of political will. A series of initiatives, including truth and reconciliation mechanisms, social cohesion programmes and dedicated ministries, focused on listening to victims, addressing grievances and promoting forgiveness. These efforts helped restore trust, strengthen national unity and support long-term stability. She emphasized that equitable infrastructure planning and non-partisan resource distribution were also essential to meeting community needs and sustaining peace.

Mr. A.R. Al Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) emphasized the need to rethink the role of parliamentarians in diplomacy, urging them to act as independent representatives of the people rather than merely echoing government positions. In a shifting global order, he called for greater political courage and strategic vision from MPs to lead reconciliation efforts and build trust across divides. Highlighting the importance of people-to-people diplomacy, he stressed that sustainable peace depends on inclusive engagement, mutual respect and the willingness to listen, especially in disagreement. He concluded by warning that hate is the true enemy of peace and stability, and that addressing it requires coordinated, inclusive action across education, legislation and community leadership.

Ms. S. Naraghi Anderlini (ICAN) underscored the urgent need to bridge the disconnect between elite-driven peace processes and the lived realities of communities, particularly those of women who are often the first to act in times of conflict but remain excluded from formal negotiations. She advocated for reframing peace efforts from "power-sharing" to "responsibility-sharing," emphasizing that true leadership must address the needs of affected populations. She criticized the UN Security Council, especially its permanent members and their role as major arms exporters, for contributing to the erosion of trust in global institutions. She called on parliaments to advance inclusive peace through legislation and to redirect resources toward strengthening the social fabric of society.

Mr. Z. Paikin (Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft) argued that global security frameworks suffer from a lack of effectiveness and inclusiveness, citing the UN Security Council's paralysis and limited representation. He proposed reforms including new permanent Security Council seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America, and a 25-yearly review of the Charter of the United Nations. On climate security, he highlighted proposals from his organization to create a P-20 platform, a global compact for climate visas, and a US\$ 15 to 20 billion fund to strengthen regional disaster response. He also called for new, regionally focused institutions to complement existing mechanisms and address the erosion of trust caused by unilateral actions and the contesting of norms.

In the ensuing interventions from the floor, participants reaffirmed the importance of inclusive peacebuilding rooted in national cohesion, social trust and strong democratic institutions. Many highlighted the erosion of public trust as a key driver of instability, underscoring the need to reconnect citizens with the State through equitable development, intergenerational dialogue and cultural identity. Dialogue, reconciliation and transparency were seen as essential ingredients for sustainable peace. Parliaments were widely recognized as crucial actors in translating international commitments into national action, particularly in areas such as conflict prevention, sustainable development and humanitarian response. Speakers stressed that peace required more than the absence of war; it demanded justice, dignity and respect for sovereignty, especially in regions affected by occupation, interference or exclusion.

Concerns were raised about the growing influence of the arms industry, rising global military spending, and the failure of multilateral mechanisms to prevent suffering and conflict. The need to redirect resources from the war economy to human security was strongly emphasized. Innovation, while acknowledged as a driver of progress, was also seen as a source of risk if not guided by ethics, regulation and a commitment to equity.

Several interventions underscored that conflicts were often rooted in poverty, exclusion and lack of opportunity, particularly for youth. Investing in education, job creation and social protection was seen as essential to addressing the underlying causes of instability. Others called for strengthened international cooperation to tackle climate insecurity, illicit financial flows and disinformation.

Across the board, participants called for bold, consistent and locally grounded actions from parliaments to uphold international law, support disarmament and promote inclusive development. A shared message emerged, echoing the principles of human security and common security: peace must be built from the ground up, with innovation, solidarity and human dignity at its core.

Panel 3

The third panel was on the theme *Achieving the SDGs by 2030: What new opportunities for international cooperation?*. It was moderated by Ms. Claire Doole, spokesperson and former BBC correspondent.

Panellists:

- **Ms. Thorunn Sveinbjarnardottir** (Iceland), Speaker of Althingi
- **Mr. Alban Bagbin** (Ghana), Speaker of Parliament
- **Ms. Susan Brown**, UN Assistant Administrator and Director of UNDP's Bureau for External Engagement and Advocacy
- **Ms. Georgina Magesa**, an 11-year-old climate activist from the United Republic of Tanzania

Before engaging in a debate, the panel reviewed the achievements made since 2015 in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): extreme poverty had declined; HIV infections were down; malaria prevention had saved millions of lives; more children were going to and staying longer in school; and presently, 92% of the global population had access to electricity. Those outcomes were not, however, accidental; they were the direct result of cooperation, policy choices, political will and also a change of mentalities. The progress that had been made clearly showed that results were achievable when there was cooperation and international solidarity.

The overall trajectory was, however, deeply concerning. Only 40% of SDG targets were on track. Climate action, in particular, was falling dangerously behind. It was pointed out that if people did not have access to their basic rights – such as health, employment, etc. – and if the environment was not sustainable, there would be no sustainable development. Without human dignity there was no sustainable development and there was no dignity without justice.

Focusing on the role of parliaments, the panel pointed out that parliaments were not bystanders in that global effort; instead, they were central actors, and citizens therefore expected parliamentarians to lead. To do so, parliaments must use their platforms to bring voices together – within their chambers, across parties and on the world stage through the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and other forums.

In terms of their legislative role, parliaments must set laws that helped implement multilateral agreements; must consider taxes and subsidies as a way to stimulate sustainable development; and parliamentarians must gather to share knowledge and raise awareness on those crucial issues.

Problems like climate change or economic inequality did not stop at national borders. Isolation was not protection; it was exposure. Parliaments must therefore legislate for the global good and ensure that laws for their communities were effectively implemented. The foundation of humanity's shared future depended on investment: in education, gender equality, jobs, healthcare, digital access. Without them, the SDGs were little more than promises on paper.

It was acknowledged that, at the same time, parliaments must confront a rising tide of misinformation, particularly around climate action. Digital manipulation was undermining science, eroding public trust and weakening democratic governance. That was not just an environmental crisis; it was a democratic one as well.

The world was witnessing an environmental collapse in real time – glaciers melted, oceans acidified, ecosystems unravelled. While some nations could adapt, many could not. In an interconnected world, their vulnerability was a collective risk. Climate action must be shared – and industrialized countries bore a historic and moral responsibility to lead.

The panel underlined that the private sector was vital. Its innovation and capital were essential, but it must not dictate the terms of progress, particularly on the climate, on digital transformation and equity. Legislators must establish strong, enforceable rules to prevent greenwashing, whether at home or abroad. Fiscal policy – including taxation – must reward genuine green innovation, not cosmetic compliance.

The reality was that SDG progress was deeply unequal. Many countries were not falling behind due to apathy, but because of global shocks, structural disadvantages and financing gaps. More was spent on war than on welfare, more on crisis than on prevention. If that continued, not only would the SDG agenda be lost but the very conditions for peace and prosperity.

Parliaments must listen to those whose lives were already affected. Young people across the world were not waiting – they were acting: planting trees, cleaning rivers, demanding justice. Their call was not for promises – it was for action, inclusion and accountability. They wanted, and deserved, to be at the table.

Parliamentarians knew what needed to be done. The solutions existed; scientists, policy experts, civil society leaders were ready. The SDGs were never about comfort – they were about courage. They were designed to be transformative, not incremental.

It was concluded that parliamentarians must be determined, more accountable and ready to change the way they proceeded to effectively achieve the SDGs. The time had come for that transformation and parliamentarians must rise to meet the moment with the urgency it demanded and the integrity it deserved.

Panel 4

The fourth panel was on the theme *What role for parliaments in shaping our digital future?*. It was moderated by Ms. Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, CEO/Founder, Women at The Table.

Panellists:

- **Mr. Hugo Motta Wanderley da Nóbrega** (Brazil), President of the Chamber of Deputies
- **Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill**, UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies
- **Ms. Sulyna Abdullah**, Chief of Strategic Planning and Membership and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- **Mr. Jovan Kurbalija**, Executive Director, DiploFoundation and Head of the Geneva Internet Platform (GIP)

The panel on parliaments' role in shaping the digital future generated tremendous interest and debate, with 11 Speakers of Parliament and 8 other participants taking the floor.

Building on the 15th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (15SWSP), which had underscored that making artificial intelligence (AI) gender-sensitive would require coordinated and determined efforts, the panel reinforced that parliamentarians had agency and political power which should be used to ensure that AI served humanity's best interests.

The following four key issues emerged from the panel's discussion:

- **There must be a legislative balance between innovation and protection.**

There could not be a choice between innovation or protection of rights because both were needed. Accordingly, it was pointed out that the dichotomy between innovation and protection was an illusion. A responsible legal framework which anchored human beings at the centre while allowing digital technology to flourish was an imperative.

- **The principle of the "Three A's" – agility, adaptability, anticipation.**

Ms. Abdullah (ITU) presented a practical tool, noting that effective legislation needed to be: **agile** to respond in a timely fashion when technology advanced fast; **adaptable** to adjust as digital technological situations changed; **anticipatory** as there was a compelling need to plan ahead for the emerging digital technologies as driven by AI.

The panel observed that there is no clear template yet for AI legislation. The effectiveness of the European Union's AI Act will only become known over time. The United Nations has so far not produced a universal framework for AI governance. Parliaments are exploring a variety of legislative approaches. There is a need for ongoing exchange of experience and lessons learned.

- **International cooperation was recognized as a condition in tackling AI governance.**

The panel unanimously agreed that no individual stakeholder could tackle adequately the challenges of AI legal governance. It was, therefore, necessary that there should be a multilateral approach in mapping out AI governance to avoid legal gaps if each country singularly developed its own legal framework for AI governance.

Speakers emphasized that the UN Global Digital Compact, adopted in September 2024, demonstrated that international cooperation on digital governance was not just possible but was essential, especially if the digital divide was to be closed holistically.

The panel also noted that digital transformation must be environmentally sustainable, with countries leveraging renewable energy for AI development to mitigate possible environmental harm.

- **There was a need for capacity-building for parliamentarians.**

It was acknowledged that parliamentarians frequently might need to appreciate and understand better the ecosystem of digital technologies. The capacity-building needed for parliamentarians in this regard did not require them to be academics but to make them appreciate the societal impacts of digital technologies so that they were equipped to exercise robust oversight on their governments and the technological companies. What was necessary for parliamentarians in their capacity-building was to familiarize them with emerging digital technologies so that they were able to monitor trends and assess impacts on society.

In Zimbabwe, for example, a parliamentary Committee of the Future was being created to work with universities on AI research and development in order to assist parliamentarians to appreciate the digital technological development trends which should be understood by the parliamentarians.

Overall, the message from the panel was clear: parliaments had both the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that the digital future served humanity.

In that context, the IPU was co-organizing a conference on *The role of parliament in shaping the future of responsible AI* in Malaysia on 28-30 November 2025, to which parliamentarians were invited to participate.

Panel 5

The fifth panel was on the theme *Protecting and promoting the rights of persons in vulnerable situations: Towards comprehensive anti-discrimination action*. It was moderated by Ms. Claire Doole, spokesperson and former BBC correspondent.

Panellists:

- **Ms. Angela Thokozile Didiza** (South Africa), Speaker of the National Assembly
- **Mr. Angelo Farrugia** (Malta), Speaker of the House of Representatives, President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law and member of the 6WCSP Preparatory Committee
- **Ms. Nada Al Nashif**, Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- **Ms. Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo**, CEO of the Global Minority Parliamentarians Caucus and President of the Swiss Diversity Association

The panel explored both persistent and emerging challenges to the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, including racial minorities, LGBTQI persons, migrants, people with disabilities and others facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

Despite international commitments and constitutional guarantees, the panellists highlighted that more than three-quarters of countries still lacked comprehensive national anti-discrimination legislation. That legal vacuum significantly impeded protection and accountability. They also emphasized the critical role of parliaments in adopting robust anti-discrimination frameworks, overseeing their implementation and ensuring access to justice. Several interventions stressed that such laws tended to be durable and enjoyed broad support once adopted, even in politically diverse environments. However, it was also clear that legal protection alone was not sufficient. Gaps in implementation, a lack of enforcement mechanisms and political reluctance remained recurring obstacles.

Throughout the discussion, participants highlighted the importance of anchoring anti-discrimination efforts in the lived realities of affected communities. Those realities included experiences of racial profiling, structural bias in service delivery, and invisibility in national data collection. The need for disaggregated data and improved monitoring mechanisms came up repeatedly, with some participants calling for parliamentary-supported platforms to track progress and inform policies.

It was also noted that the gap between international norms and domestic practice was growing wider through the erosion of multilateralism and increasing resistance to human rights. Several concerns were raised about the use of social media to amplify harmful stereotypes and scapegoating narratives.

Education and public engagement were identified as essential tools to promote inclusion and human dignity. Parliaments were called upon not only to legislate but also to act as forums for public debate and social dialogue. Examples of effective community engagement and human rights education were shared, underscoring the need to build a culture of rights from the ground up and to address the fears of those who felt threatened by diversity, in a way that fostered understanding, promoted equality and embraced diversity as a collective strength.

Throughout the discussion, the need for partnerships – with national human rights institutions, civil society, the private sector, and international bodies – was emphasized. Some participants highlighted the potential of cross-regional parliamentary cooperation to exchange good practices, monitor implementation and foster solidarity in the face of backlash. In this regard, the audience acknowledged the IPU as a valuable platform for parliaments to exchange experiences and approaches to addressing key challenges.

In the concluding reflections, the importance of political leadership and inclusive participation in driving change was emphasized. Calls were made to promote gender quotas and reserved parliamentary seats for marginalized communities. The panel underscored that fostering diversity, equity and inclusion was not merely a legal or policy issue – it was a question of democratic legitimacy and societal resilience.