



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament: Inaugural session

Geneva, 29 July 2025

Madam Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva,
Madam Riniker, President of the National Council of Switzerland,
Dr. Ackson, President of the IPU,
Mr. Rattray, Chef de Cabinet of the United Nations Secretary-General,
Our special guest, Mr. Douglas,
Esteemed Speakers of Parliament,
Dear colleagues,

I join Madam President of the IPU in welcoming you to Geneva: the city of peace, diplomacy, human rights – and indeed the home of our global parliamentary community, and therefore parliamentary diplomacy. Since the turn of the 21st century, every five years, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has convened Speakers of Parliament to take stock of the state of the world, to build and strengthen parliamentary diplomacy in the service of peace and understanding, and to advance strong and effective multilateralism.

As we begin our Sixth Conference, we have to face an uncomfortable truth—as Madam President has just stated: the multilateral system as we know it is in crisis. Some actors are not just turning away from long-established mechanisms but actively trying to undermine them. The United Nations in particular is under immense pressure to reform and revitalise, to build on its 80-year history and embrace the challenges of the next 80 years. So it is a fitting symbol that we are meeting here in the newly refurbished Palais des Nations.

The United Nations Office at Geneva has recognized the need to modernize its infrastructure to respond to new challenges and preserve its heritage. Let us hope that those efforts have laid the groundwork for the UN and all other organizations of what we call International Geneva to find a new resolve and serve the people of the world for decades to come. On that note, I believe the presence of the world's Speakers in the very first meeting being held in this renovated historical building conveys a powerful message: if international cooperation is to be democratic and inclusive, then parliamentarians – as the elected representatives of the people – must play a prominent role.

Since 1889 the IPU has served that very noble cause: to bring together parliamentarians from around the world to engage in dialogue and diplomacy, to bring the voice of the people to the multilateral system, and to find solutions to the urgent problems our world is facing. And here I must emphasize that, above all else, the IPU – and I think every single one of its Member Parliaments – wants these events to be inclusive, respectful and safe. We are not just here to talk, but to listen. We are not here to score political points or to let emotions get the better of us, but to engage with our colleagues from around the world in a spirit of integrity, solidarity and respect. This is not a space for emphasizing divisions but for building bridges. I am sure we will all want to bear this in mind in the coming days.

Of course, no one would dispute that the formal negotiation and conclusion of international agreements lie firmly within the domain of the executive arms of governments. But international cooperation does not end with the signing of agreements; on the contrary, that is where it truly begins. Cooperation becomes meaningful when multilateral commitments are translated into tangible actions, when the decisions that are taken in New York, Geneva, Nairobi or Vienna are brought home and implemented for the benefit of the people.

In this regard, parliamentary diplomacy – nurtured and supported by the IPU for 136 years – is an important complement to traditional diplomacy and cooperation efforts between governments. The IPU does not seek to compete with the United Nations, but to complement it. Last year, we were pleased to see that relationship recognized explicitly in the Pact for the Future through a commitment to deepen United Nations engagement with national parliaments and the IPU. The IPU will continue its efforts to engage parliamentarians not only to implement United Nations agreements and resolutions, but to bring their valuable experience and expertise to the processes leading to their creation. In this endeavour it is encouraged by the massive support it received from the UN member states, when only this Friday, adopted in the UN General Assembly, the resolution on the interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU.

Our General Debate in the coming days will focus on how continued inter-parliamentary cooperation can strengthen the multilateral system. Because when that system is threatened or undermined, it is not a call to step back and let it crumble, it is a call to *recommit*, to *revitalize*, and to *reinforce* it, ensuring that our shared values are truly reflected within it: human rights, democracy, inclusion, and peaceful dialogue as the *only* legitimate path for resolving disputes between nations.

Thus, we will also delve into certain important issues in our panel discussions. First among them will be a discussion of women's and youth participation in parliament. As I am sure you know, gender equality is at the heart of the IPU's Strategy and runs like a red thread through all of our work. In 2025, the IPU membership has chosen gender equality as the IPU's priority theme. As you have just heard, yesterday we concluded the 16th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament. But earlier this year we also held a hugely successful Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians in Mexico City. At our 150th Assembly in Tashkent, we were pleased to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and to launch our new campaign, *Achieving gender equality, action by action*. I hope all of you here will take time to reflect on whether your Parliament could adopt any of the 10 actions set out in the campaign.

Tomorrow, the first panel will look at peace and security, which I am sure we can all agree, with conflict still rife in many corners of the world, is at the top of the multilateral agenda. I am sure you will join me in my clarion call for full respect for international humanitarian law in conflict zones dotted across the world, and very recently with the eruption of conflict between Cambodia and Thailand. Then, with just five years to go on the 2030 Agenda, we will be looking at new opportunities to reinvigorate the Sustainable Development Goals. I want to salute the support the IPU is receiving from the UN member states, especially Uzbekistan, whose president, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has spearheaded UN recognition of parliaments' role in the SDGs. I use this opportunity to stress the importance of the Tashkent Declaration adopted at the landmark 150th IPU Assembly last April. Another subject on everyone's minds is the emergence of new technologies, perhaps most notably artificial intelligence: we will also therefore be taking an opportunity to explore what role parliaments can play in shaping our digital future. Finally, as we are in the city of human rights, we will be inviting you to discuss how parliaments can protect the rights of people in vulnerable situations and fight the scourge of discrimination.

With a view to delivering on the IPU's commitment to engage with the broader parliamentary ecosystem, on the final day we have arranged a unique interactive debate with major stakeholders from International Geneva and beyond. We hope that this will provide an opportunity to explore how a more inclusive and networked form of multilateralism could yield more effective outcomes.

I will leave you with one final reflection. You may be aware that the IPU's motto is "For democracy. For everyone". We work on many fronts to strengthen the democratic credentials of our Member Parliaments. And we do so because we believe that democracy is the very foundation of multilateralism. And that only a strong, democratic multilateral system, with parliaments at the forefront, can deliver peace, prosperity and justice for everyone.

I wish you a fruitful Conference. Thank you.