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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Parliamentary Legislative Forum on Best Legislative Practices in the Field of Artificial Intelligence

Abu Dhabi, 7 October 2025

His Excellency Mr. Saqr Ghobash, Speaker of the Federal National Council,
Distinguished parliamentarians, colleagues, friends,

Legislative Practices in the Field of Artificial Intelligence are an issue that has quickly risen to a very prominent place on the IPU's agenda, and I am grateful to the Federal National Council for the invitation to share some thoughts with you today.

We meet at a moment of profound urgency. Artificial intelligence is not approaching—it has arrived. It is reshaping economies, transforming societies, and challenging the very foundations of how we govern. The decisions we make today may determine whether AI becomes a force that strengthens democracy and improves lives, or one that concentrates power, deepens inequalities, and undermines the institutions we serve.

The question before us is not whether to act, but how to act wisely, effectively, and collectively. I note with great interest the leadership and vision that GCC countries are demonstrating.

Where We Stand Today

From IPU's monitoring, we know that more than 50 parliaments around the world are taking action on artificial intelligence. Legislation is being debated in capitals from Brussels to Beijing, from Washington to this very region. Some countries have adopted wide-ranging laws; many others - at least 33, by our count - are in the process of drafting legislation.

And let us be honest: we are all learning, all experimenting, all grappling with the same fundamental challenge—how to govern a technology that evolves faster than our legislative processes.

As parliaments, we face two essential questions that will define our success or failure.

First: **What is right for our societies?** Countries and regions are choosing the paths that reflect their distinct values, contexts, and aspirations. The European Union emphasizes fundamental rights and risk-based regulation. The United States focuses on innovation and sectoral approaches. China pursues technological sovereignty and social governance. There is no single correct answer, but there is a wrong one—inaction in the face of transformation.

Second: **What will actually work?** We must craft laws that not only define important principles, but can also be implemented, that won't be obsolete before the ink is dry, that will have genuine impact on how AI is developed and deployed. I think many of us are watching with great interest to see whether the EU's AI Act, for example, will have the intended effect of protecting citizens from risks, while also creating a predictable environment for investment.

What We Want—And What We Must Protect

Let me be clear about what we are working toward.

We need more **international and regional cooperation**. AI does not respect borders. The algorithms that power search engines, the models that generate content, the systems that make critical decisions—they flow across our countries seamlessly. We need coordination on standards, on risk assessments, on

fundamental safeguards. But here we face a critical tension: how do we achieve harmonization while preserving our national sovereignty and democratic autonomy?

The answer is not to choose between global cooperation and national control—it is to be strategic about which challenges require international coordination and which are best addressed through our own democratic processes. Issues like autonomous weapons, critical infrastructure protection, and fundamental rights may warrant international frameworks.

Regional cooperation allows countries with shared values, geographic proximity, and similar challenges to develop more detailed AI frameworks than global agreements permit, while maintaining interoperability with international standards.

The GCC countries, for instance, have unique opportunities to coordinate on AI governance for sectors critical to the region—from energy and infrastructure to Arabic language processing—creating economies of scale while preserving each nation's sovereign decision-making authority.

But how we balance privacy and innovation, how we support our national languages and cultural contexts, how we address our specific economic needs—these are legitimately matters for national determination.

We know that in all these processes, we want **parliaments to be centrally involved**. Not as rubber stamps for technical decisions made elsewhere, but as the democratic heart of AI governance. Our role is irreplaceable—we represent the people, we embody diverse perspectives, we provide democratic legitimacy that no algorithm can replicate.

We want **national capacity building**. This means investing in AI expertise within our governments, supporting research in our universities, ensuring our national languages are not left behind in the AI revolution. If we allow AI to be developed only in a handful of languages, by a handful of countries, for a handful of contexts, we risk digital colonialism by another name.

What We Must Prevent

But defining what we want is only part of the story. If anything, it is easier to identify what we do not want, and what we must work to prevent.

We cannot accept the **concentration of power**—whether in a few technology companies, a few countries, or a few hands within our own governments. AI's potential to concentrate decision-making power is unprecedented, and it runs counter to everything democratic governance stands for.

We reject a **winner-takes-all mentality** where AI development becomes a zero-sum competition rather than a shared challenge requiring cooperation.

We must prevent **digital divides** from widening. If AI amplifies existing inequalities—between rich and poor nations, between urban and rural areas, between those with digital access and those without—we will have failed.

We cannot ignore **environmental destruction**. The massive computational power required to train AI models has real environmental costs. As we pursue technological progress, we cannot abandon our climate commitments.

And we must address **harms**—individual harms from algorithmic bias, societal harms from misinformation and manipulation, and even existential risks from advanced AI systems. We must be particularly vigilant about the perpetuation of inequalities, including between women and men, that can be encoded and amplified by AI systems.

AI as a Challenge to Parliaments Themselves

But let us turn the lens on ourselves for a moment. AI is not just something for parliaments to regulate—it is a force that will reshape the institution of parliament itself.

Today, this challenge is formulated as a series of questions, to which the answers will emerge over time, through debate and lived experiences.

How will AI impact our decision-making processes? Will we use AI tools to analyze legislation, to engage with constituents, to understand complex policy trade-offs? And if we do, how do we maintain human judgment and democratic accountability?

Given the speed of evolution of AI, how do we plan for a future characterized by radical uncertainty? Our legislative processes were designed for stability, for deliberation, for measured change. AI demands we remain agile without sacrificing thoughtfulness.

These are not hypothetical questions. They are challenges we face today.

What Parliaments Can Do

So what is to be done? Let me suggest several concrete actions for parliaments.

First, create dedicated structures—both within parliament and across government—to oversee AI. This might be specialized committees, parliamentary offices with technical expertise, or cross-party working groups. We need institutional capacity that matches the challenge.

Second, invest in AI literacy at all levels—among parliamentarians, in public administration, among the judiciary and civil society. We cannot govern what we do not understand. And this literacy must go beyond technical knowledge to encompass ethical implications, societal impacts, and democratic values.

Third, embrace multi-stakeholder approaches. We must speak with the private sector developing AI, with researchers, with civil society defending rights, and most importantly, with the people whose lives are affected. Those working in sectors being transformed by AI, those facing algorithmic decisions about their healthcare or their employment—their voices must inform our legislation.

Fourth, think simultaneously about the short-term and the long-term. We need guardrails today for AI systems being deployed now. But we also need frameworks flexible enough to address AI capabilities that don't yet exist.

Fifth, to keep in mind one of my key takeaways from the Parliamentary Track at the Internet Governance Forum in Saudi Arabia in December 2024, that **AI is too important not to legislate, and too important not to legislate well.** It is encouraging that parliaments are deliberating, consulting, learning, using their full range of legislative and oversight powers. Time is of the essence; yet wisdom must also guide our actions.

What We Can Do Together

But individual parliamentary action, however wise, is not enough. We must decide to work together. We must not repeat the mistakes of internet governance, where power and wealth became concentrated in the hands of a few corporations and countries, leaving much of the world as consumers rather than shapers of the digital revolution. With AI, we have a brief window to work towards collective governance before divisive patterns become entrenched, with potentially much more significant consequences.

The IPU's 2024 resolution on *The impact of AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law* provides a clear sign of parliamentary commitment and a roadmap for our organization in coming years. Among other things, the resolution “urges parliaments to place a high priority on debates related to AI”, and also to “ensure their policy responses evolve in line with advances in AI technology”.

We should support UN initiatives, including the Global Digital Compact and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance. But let us be clear—we need much more than dialogue. We need concrete frameworks, mutual recognition of standards, mechanisms for cooperation that respect both our shared interests and our sovereign choices.

I believe that we must also use our political and economic influence to require investment in AI safety and alignment. We can make it clear that companies seeking to operate in our markets must meet standards that protect our citizens. We can be tireless promoters of the need for international cooperation, including in our bilateral contacts with other countries at the forefront of AI technology.

And we can learn from each other. A parliament in one of our countries may develop an innovative approach to algorithmic transparency. Another may create effective mechanisms for public participation in AI governance. We should systematically share these best practices, adapting them to our contexts rather than importing them wholesale.

In just a few weeks, the IPU, together with the Parliament of Malaysia, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and UNDP, will convene parliamentarians in Kuala Lumpur for an international conference on the Role of Parliament in Shaping the Future of Responsible AI—a critical opportunity to build our collective capacity, share knowledge, and forge concrete action plans for both governing AI and harnessing it within our own institutions. I extend an invitation to the parliaments here today to join this critical discussion with the wider parliamentary community.

A Positive Vision for AI and Humanity

Let me conclude by returning to first principles. I believe that while acknowledging the risks, we must develop a positive vision for AI and humanity—and work relentlessly toward it.

This vision rests on **increased cooperation** and the understanding that we truly are all in this together. AI's risks and benefits will not be contained within borders. Our fates are intertwined.

It means **addressing people's real needs**—using AI to improve healthcare, to enhance education, to solve problems that matter to ordinary citizens. AI should not be an end in itself, but a tool for human flourishing.

It means helping **democracy deliver on its promises** to improve people's lives. Systems of democratic governance need to harness AI for the public good to build trust and strengthen their legitimacy.

Above all, it means keeping **core democratic values at the heart of the system**. The Sustainable Development Goals call for effective, accountable, and transparent decision-making. They call for responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative governance. These principles must guide our approach to AI.

Success is not guaranteed. It depends entirely on our collective efforts—on the choices we make in our parliaments, on the legislation we pass, on the vision we articulate and fight for.

I want to close with words from Dario Amodei, CEO of one of the leading AI companies. He said: "If we want AI to favor democracy and individual rights, we are going to have to fight for that outcome." Fight for it we must. Some may call this vision utopian. I ask you to consider the alternative—a world where AI is governed by the powerful for the powerful, where democratic values are an afterthought, where our parliaments become irrelevant to the most transformative technology of our time.

That alternative is unacceptable. The urgent work before us—the work of crafting wise legislation, building institutional capacity, cooperating across borders while respecting sovereignty, placing human dignity and democratic values at the center—this work is not optional. It is one of the defining responsibilities of our generation.

Let us rise to meet it. Together.

Thank you.