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For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

AI Impact Summit

Democracy Cannot Be Automated
Session on AI for Democracy: Reimagining Governance in the Age of Intelligence, India

New Delhi, 20 February 2026

Honourable Speaker Birla,
Dr. Pandya,
Distinguished panellists and guests,

I am honoured to address you today at this landmark summit. India's decision to host the AI Impact Summit here in New Delhi sends a powerful signal. It proves that the conversation about artificial intelligence cannot be confined to capitals of a few nations or the boardrooms of technology companies. This dialogue must belong to all of humanity.

The theme of this session – AI for Democracy – cuts to the heart of this matter. We are not simply debating a new technology. We are debating the future shape of power. Who will hold it? Who will be accountable for it? And will the institutions that citizens depend upon – institutions built over generations to protect rights, resolve disputes and represent the will of the people – be strengthened or sidelined in the age of artificial intelligence?

Let me be direct about what is at stake. AI is not a future challenge. It is transforming our societies now. AI-generated content already features in election campaigns across multiple continents. Deepfakes have been used to discredit political actors, disproportionately affecting women. Algorithmic systems are making decisions about who receives public services, who qualifies for a loan, and who is flagged for surveillance. Those who design, train and deploy these systems wield influence not only over individual users, but over the information environment of democracy itself.

At the first international parliamentary conference on responsible AI last November in Malaysia, MPs raised cases that brought these risks into sharp focus. In Amsterdam, an automated traffic management system inadvertently routed congestion through low-income neighbourhoods, because the algorithm had learned that those communities lacked the political influence to object. Examples like these will scale rapidly if governance does not keep pace, perpetuating harms against those historically excluded from decision-making.

Yet democratic governance is not keeping pace. Power is accumulating rapidly in the hands of those at the forefront of AI development. A handful of technology corporations now command market capitalizations exceeding the entire equity markets of major industrialized nations, while millions of workers in the global south are paid little to annotate the datasets on which these systems are trained. The benefits of AI are increasingly concentrated, while many of the costs fall on those with the least power to shape the technology.

This is not merely an economic concern. It is a democratic concern. When the systems that govern aspects of people's daily lives – their access to information, services, and economic opportunity – are controlled by a small number of actors without meaningful public oversight, then the social contract itself is under strain.

That is why we must frame this not simply as technology policy, but as democratic governance. The choices made today about how AI is developed, deployed, and regulated involve trade-offs between

innovation and safety, efficiency and equity, profit and the public interest. In any healthy democracy, those trade-offs are debated openly, decided transparently, and subject to accountability.

The parliamentary community declared in Malaysia that: “We do not accept the concentration of power in the hands of a few actors.” They called on all stakeholders to agree upon red lines that this technology cannot cross. They insisted on an equal voice for the Global South. And they called on all parliaments to engage actively with AI governance efforts at every level.

The principle that elected legislatures shape the rules governing society is the cornerstone of democracy. But the contribution of parliaments to AI governance goes beyond that basic principle. Parliaments are where the real-world impact of AI meets political accountability. Members of parliament hear directly from workers affected by automation, from communities concerned about algorithmic decision-making, from parents navigating their children’s relationship with technology. This connects governance to lived experience and informs the AI debate through the values of the people. Parliaments can and must stimulate that broader societal conversation – through hearings, consultations, and multi-stakeholder dialogues.

This brings me to the international dimension. AI is a truly global challenge whose effects transcend national borders. While the risks are real – from job displacement to environmental costs – so too are the opportunities. AI has genuine potential to improve healthcare, expand access to education, and accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. But those benefits will not be shared equitably by default. That requires deliberate, collective action, and it requires that the countries with the most to gain are not shut out of the conversation.

Yet international AI governance remains fragmented and short on binding commitments. Geopolitical competition risks fracturing governance efforts further. That is why this summit, and those which follow, must embody the inclusive, participatory approach that the equitable governance of AI demands. Parliaments are pivotal to ensuring coherence between domestic legislation, established human rights, and evolving international standards – and to holding their governments accountable for the commitments made at summits like this one.

The IPU is committed to supporting that engagement. In the past two years, over sixty parliaments have taken action on AI, from comprehensive legislation to oversight inquiries. Across the world, parliaments are forming cross-party groups, establishing specialized committees, and building capacity. The foundations are being laid, but they need to be built on faster, with increased coordination across borders. Parliaments are also beginning to explore how AI can support their own work – and those that experience its promise and limitations first-hand will bring far greater understanding to the task of governing it.

So let me return to the principle at the heart of what I have said today: democracy cannot be automated. It must be shaped by every one of us – through our democratic institutions, through open debate, through laws made transparently and enforced fairly, and through international cooperation in which every nation can participate.

The choices we make will determine whether AI furthers democracy or erodes it. If we succeed, AI can become a tool for inclusion, participation, human rights, and better governance. If we fail, it risks becoming a force which concentrates power, weakens accountability, and erodes trust in public institutions. The task before us is to embed democratic accountability, human rights and the rule of law at the heart of how AI is designed, deployed and governed. This summit is a critical opportunity to advance that mission. Let us make the most of it together.

Thank you.