



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

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## Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

High-level Conference on the Future of Democracy Support, organized by the  
European Parliament

Panel discussion: A global conversation of democracy supporters

Brussels, 19 March 2026

Madam President,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

We have come to the end of a critical discussion on the future of democracy support. We have all highlighted the various challenges democracy is facing today. We have acknowledged that we are operating in a new era defined by growing mistrust in governance institutions, rapid technological change, conflict, complex geopolitical challenges and a weakening of belief in dialogue.

Democracy is at the heart of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's mission and motto: **For democracy. For everyone.** Born more than 130 years ago from the visionary minds of William Randal Cremer and Frédéric Passy – two Nobel Peace Prize winners who believed that dialogue could replace conflict – the IPU has since served as a global forum for exchange, cooperation and the advancement of parliaments working for peace and democracy.

In 1997, the IPU adopted the **Universal Declaration on Democracy**, the first time that the international community had defined democracy as a “universal aspiration” and a “fundamental right”.

Why does this matter? Because democracy is not a destination, it is the road to progress; it is a living organism that requires constant nourishment, defence and evolution. It is also the only system of governance with a self-correcting capacity. There is always room for improvement, change, learning and adapting. So, to a certain extent, there will always be a need for democracy support. It may take different forms, but it is a healthy exercise and endeavour, which benefits all those involved.

Our work at the IPU has focused on building strong parliamentary institutions that have the capacity, will and power to carry out their constitutional mandate. And in that endeavour we are guided by several key principles and objectives, which I would like to develop a little here.

The first is the importance of anchoring **values** at the heart of our work and building a common base of understanding and vision. As a global political and parliamentary organization, the IPU has worked overtime on building this common vision of democracy. This is at the heart of our work and is the result of inclusive processes involving our 183 Member Parliaments in all their diversity, building on their experience, successes and failures, and challenging them in their convictions and objectives. It is also the result of work with partners and the multitude of other stakeholders working for democracy.

The latest “product” of this work is the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, which were developed by the IPU, UNDP, InterPares, UN Women, CPA, WFD and Directorio Legislativo. The Indicators not only help build a common understanding of democratic parliaments, but they also measure the level of democracy. The Indicators are owned by parliaments and are at the heart of processes of parliamentary self-assessments and efforts for sustainable progress.

This brings me to my second point: the importance of self-development and peer-to-peer support or finding sources for progress from within. Every year, the IPU provides hands-on assistance to dozens of parliaments, particularly in post-conflict zones or emerging democracies. Whether it is supporting

parliaments in applying the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, assisting in the drafting of legal frameworks, building effective administrative services and systems, or helping a parliament implement digital transparency tools, the IPU accompanies multiple national parliaments in their development. And I would like to place emphasis on the word “accompanies”.

At the core of our approach to parliamentary strengthening are the **Common Principles for Support to Parliament**, which were developed by a group of parliaments and partners (including the European Parliament), convened by the IPU more than 10 years ago. The 10 Common Principles reiterate the importance of parliaments remaining in the driving seat of their own development, while respecting an inclusive, transparent and rights-based approach to the provision of support. As of today, the Principles have been endorsed by 192 parliaments, parliamentary assemblies and partners. For us, they embody the priority of self-development through peer-to-peer support, which we see as a powerful and sustainable way to achieve change.

My third point is the need for dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy in support of democratic resilience. Allow me to illustrate this with a few figures related to inclusive and representative parliaments. The most recent global analysis by the IPU shows that, despite gradual improvements, women remain significantly under-represented in parliaments worldwide, with a mere 27.5% of MPs being women, and a stagnation of progress in recent years.

Progress on youth participation has also stalled, with only 2.8% of MPs being aged 30 and under, unchanged since 2023. For young women, there has even been a regression, with only 1.2% of MPs being women 30 and under, a decrease of 0.3 points since 2023.

In addition, across many countries we are seeing a worrying rise in intimidation, harassment and violence against parliamentarians. A recent global study produced by the IPU showed that a large majority of MPs report experiencing intimidation or violence from members of the public, often in the form of online abuse, threats or the spread of false or misleading information. At the same time, parliamentarians, generally from the opposition, in many countries continue to face State-sponsored abuse, including judicial harassment, politically motivated prosecutions, arbitrary detention and restrictions on their ability to carry out their mandates.

Our research confirms a trend of growing challenges to diversity in political representation, which weakens parliaments as democratic institutions.

The IPU’s **Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians** is the only global parliamentary body with a mandate to protect MPs. Currently, the committee is investigating cases involving over **1,000 parliamentarians** worldwide – men and women facing arbitrary arrest, exclusion from office or physical violence. By bringing these cases into the international spotlight, the IPU acts as a safeguard and also engages the responsibility of parliamentarians around the world to defend each other, building on parliamentary solidarity and diplomacy.

A similar approach is used to support progress in terms of women’s representation and youth participation in parliament. Through platforms of peer-to-peer monitoring and exchange, parliamentarians within the IPU challenge each other and support one another to push for reforms. Through our governing bodies, the IPU also regularly examines situations in which parliamentary institutions are under serious strain or where democratic standards appear to be deteriorating.

Experiences such as these illustrate how international cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy can help parliaments strengthen their institutional practices.

I would like to end with five points related to the future of democracy support:

- **First**, we need to acknowledge that we cannot do away with democracy support. This should always be at the core of our various institutions' work.
- **Second**, democracy support is not a standalone objective but should be viewed in connection with developmental and societal objectives. There can be no sustainable progress on education, climate change, health and more without a sound governance system in place.
- **Third**, a priority for the future should be rebuilding trust. For us at the IPU, this means working beyond parliaments, with an ecosystem of actors that are needed for strong democracies.
- **Fourth**, I would plead for democracy support that is inclusive of all situations, including the most dire ones. Democracy support not only supports progress but also mitigates backsliding, which is often difficult to give visibility to.
- **Last**, democracy support, like democracy itself, should continuously evolve. Spaces for exchanges like these today are therefore essential.

Thank you.