



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Inaugural Ceremony of the 152nd IPU Assembly

Istanbul, 15 April 2026

Your Excellency, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, Mr. Numan Kurtulmuş,
Mr. Martin Chungong, distinguished Secretary General of the IPU,
Honourable Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,
Honourable members of parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My speeches often begin by conveying the honour and pride that I feel in presiding over the IPU. Please do not get me wrong, that sentiment remains as strong as ever. Yet today, I would like to begin somewhat differently.

Dear friends,

Our Assemblies should *never* be taken for granted.

In the weeks leading up to this meeting, the rapidly evolving crisis in the Middle East has cast a long shadow over international affairs and multilateralism. But the IPU, an institution that has endured for 137 years – through the upheavals of the twentieth century and the trials of this one – has once again stood firm.

That endurance speaks to the Organization's institutional resilience and reflects a very deep conviction: that the voices of the people cannot, and will not, fall silent in the face of crisis. The IPU is as strong as its Member Parliaments. And today, here in Istanbul, we see that strength in full measure.

In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, and to its Speaker, His Excellency Numan Kurtulmuş. Mr. Speaker, at a moment when tensions and uncertainty escalated sharply across the world, the Parliament of Türkiye did not retreat. You chose dialogue over doubt.

In doing so, you have reminded us that even in the most difficult of times, parliamentary diplomacy must endure. IPU Assemblies are a vital space where the representatives of the people come together, not when it is most convenient, but precisely when it matters the most.

So, to our gracious hosts in the Republic of Türkiye, and to all those whose dedication and resilience in the face of adversity have made this Assembly possible, I extend my sincere gratitude. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed. Please join me in a round of applause for our hosts.

Dear colleagues,

The world is in turmoil.

However, I would like to remind you that what we are witnessing today is not inevitable. It is the consequence of choices – choices that have favoured short-term interests over long-term accountability. Too often, the future has been treated as expendable. Yet it is future generations who will carry the burden of today's political decisions.

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We see the cost of this failure very starkly in the growing resort to violence as a tool of international affairs: in Iran, Lebanon, Israel, across the Middle East, in Ukraine, across the Sahel, in Myanmar, Haiti, and in far too many other places. Once again, violence is being used to settle disputes among people and nations.

We fail to listen to a lesson history has taught us time and again: peace is not secured through strength; violence does not resolve conflict. It perpetuates it. Every bomb dropped and every life lost sets in motion forces that will lead to retaliation, further conflict, and further suffering. As Martin Luther King Jr. warned, “violence is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.”

On this point, the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, as required by the UN Charter, is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative. A moral imperative to ensure that future generations can live in peace and dignity and are not condemned to perpetual cycles of conflict.

It is no wonder that many young people today feel disillusioned about the future. Across the world, we have seen ‘Generation Z’ rise in protest. Their voices are driven by anxiety, frustration, and a profound concern for what lies ahead for themselves and for generations to come.

Globally, young people report lower levels of well-being, happiness, and belief in democratic institutions than their elders. This growing despair originates from a feeling of reduced agency – a sense that they are mere passengers in a world shaped by choices they did not make. And when half of the world’s population is under 30 but only 2.6% of parliamentarians fall into that age group, the numbers prove them right!

Nowhere is this failure more evident than in the climate crisis, one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century. At a moment that calls for foresight and responsibility, much of today’s global leadership remains preoccupied with power struggles reminiscent of the nineteenth century’s gunboat diplomacy.

While attention and resources are diverted towards war, the climate crisis deepens. And we are truly off track: according to the World Meteorological Organization’s latest State of the Global Climate report, the Earth’s climate is more out of balance than at any time in observed history¹. Extreme weather events are intensifying. Droughts and wildfires are spreading. Oceans are warming, sea levels are rising, and ecosystems are being pushed to the brink.

What we are doing, quite simply, is condemning future generations to precarity, to a more fragile and dangerous world.

Honourable members of parliament,

Much like the bleak picture I have just painted is the result of choices, we too have a choice today. We can walk this path and be complicit in the problem. Or we can rise to the moment and spearhead solutions.

The good news is that parliaments are central to the system of government and to public life in each of our countries. They are where differences are addressed, but also where ideas emerge, are challenged, and turned into practical responses. Parliaments are, at their best, fertile ground for building consensus.

I believe that the first step is clear. We must reject short-termism and anchor our decisions in social and intergenerational justice. In plain terms, this means ensuring fairness in how we distribute resources, risks and opportunities not only among those alive today but also with a duty to those who will follow.

And this is also an act of political integrity. Politicians who think only in terms of electoral cycles, news headlines and the immediacy of markets are, in effect, mortgaging the future for short-term gain.

¹ <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/earths-climate-swings-increasingly-out-of-balance>

Furthermore, we must address gaps in representation and inclusiveness. The answer to “democratic fatigue” lies in ensuring that people can see themselves in the institutions that claim to speak on their behalf. When parliaments reflect the true diversity of society, including women, young people and underrepresented communities, their decisions are better informed, they command greater legitimacy, and they are more likely to endure.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the IPU Secretary General has just noted, human rights are the IPU’s priority theme for 2026. The protection of human rights and the rule of law is the bedrock of peaceful and just societies.

In practice, this responsibility is carried out in our committees, in plenary debates, and in the scrutiny of every piece of legislation that passes through our chambers. And by exercising oversight with rigour, we can make sure that human rights are upheld in practice and not just proclaimed.

We also need to be honest about the drivers of instability and division in so many of our societies and across the world. Tangible inequalities continue to grow, with wealth and power increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to widen.

And with 2030 approaching, delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals must become a matter of priority. People need to see progress in their own lives, in their communities, in the opportunities available to them. People need to see democracy *working for them*. This is how trust in public institutions is nurtured!

Dear friends,

There is no doubt in my mind that our best hope for peace and justice lies in a strong multilateral system, with the United Nations at its centre and parliaments playing their part. Through their legislative, oversight, budgetary and representational roles, parliaments can reinforce and complement traditional diplomacy. Parliamentary diplomacy can help keep dialogue alive. It can build bridges and ease tensions, even when formal channels are under strain.

So we must push back against the idea that cooperation and dialogue are powerless, that international humanitarian law can be cast aside, or that zero-sum thinking should define global affairs.

The theme of this Assembly calls on us to nurture hope, secure peace and ensure justice for future generations. Let me leave you with three simple asks that lie within our reach as parliamentarians and political leaders:

- First, choose inclusion so that people feel heard, represented, and able to shape their own futures.
- Second, always choose dialogue – even when it is slow and difficult – because, as it is often said, you cannot bomb your way to peace.
- And third, choose to lead with foresight, courage, and a clear sense of duty to those who will inherit the world we are currently shaping.

Thank you.