



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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## Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Opening of the General Debate of the 152nd IPU Assembly

Istanbul, 16 April 2026

Mr. Secretary General,  
Honourable Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends, dear colleagues,

We are gathered here, in Istanbul, at the crossroads of continents and civilizations, to debate nurturing hope, securing peace and ensuring justice for future generations, at a time when, you may argue, the present is more in jeopardy than the future. When

- Global conflict overshadows hope;
- Peace has been disfigured into a battle for dominance;
- And justice is shaped not by universal standards, but by whichever rights powerful actors choose to recognize

I mentioned in my remarks yesterday that the world is in turmoil. I do not want to deliver a message of despair today, but I do want to recognize the moment in which we are living.

The first thing we owe to future generations is an honest appraisal of the present, of the world they are set to inherit if business as usual continues. That is a world which is becoming less peaceful, less just, and less hopeful. A world that is irreparably damaged and more dangerous, because we have not managed to avert the climate emergency. A world where unregulated technologies may harm rather than help. A world where millions of people are still hungry, displaced, traumatized, uneducated and less prosperous, and where women are less equal than men. A world which is less democratic and less free. But that is the world that the children of your children, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends and colleagues, will inherit, if we don't take urgent action today.

There is, however, reason to hope. I would like to share three optimistic reflections with you today.

*Firstly*, 80 years ago, an international system was established, to protect future generations from the evils of war, injustice and inequality, and help them live in peace, free from fear and want.

Dear friends, let me remind you, who are seated here today – we are those future generations. Most of us were not born when the United Nations was founded. It was for us, for our dignity and our prosperity, that an international order grounded in universal rights was established.

Yes, that system is flawed. We have acknowledged it ourselves. The High-Level Declaration from the Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament reminds us that the UN needs reform. But that does not take away from something all of us in this room, all Members of the IPU, share: a commitment to multilateralism and an agreement on the fundamental rights and freedoms of all people, as a cornerstone of peace and justice in our world.

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Today we see many violations of these rights and freedoms, a growing culture of impunity – no doubt many of you will voice these in our General Debate. But I ask you also to remember what an achievement it was and continues to be, that the nations of the world shared a common understanding that all people are equal in rights and dignity, what these rights entail, and that there is an intrinsic link between the rights, which all of us in this room have committed to uphold, and lasting freedom, justice and peace.

Let us recall these shared principles, and other shared agendas, such as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ladies and gentlemen, it is not about doing better, it is about honouring and upholding what past generations, what our constitutions, and what our own national laws have already committed to.

*Secondly*, the immense potential of parliamentary action, for the sake of future generations. I invite you to reflect on what a privilege it is to be a legislator. We create the laws that make our societies, our regions and our world more just. We ratify international treaties. We oversee the work of the executive and approve budgets, to make sure that the promises made to the people are delivered upon. And most importantly, we represent the people. We carry their needs, hopes and aspirations from the kitchen table or village square and into the debate chamber.

Dialogue is an essential tool for resolving conflict, and parliamentary diplomacy is gaining greater traction in conflict resolution. We parliamentarians have the benefit of agility. We are in contact with our ministers, just as we are speaking to our constituents. We encounter each other in parliament, and we meet MPs from around the world. Our mandate is defined by dialogue and, equally important, action.

The way we exercise our parliamentary mandate, how we uphold the rule of law, the way we interact with our constituents and our peers, all of these will impact how future generations will live, and the confidence they have in their public institutions.

Our institutions are not perfect, our colleagues are not perfect, we ourselves are not perfect. But we have the opportunity, every day, to improve.

This brings me to my *third* point: solidarity. The first sentence of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is well known. It tells us that *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*. But there is a second sentence of Article 1, much less known, which says that: *They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood*.

80 years ago, we committed ourselves not just to upholding norms and standards, but also to upholding fraternity and sorority. I view this less as a legal commitment, and more as an expression of humanity and of values that long predate our international system. Having this in Article 1 underlines all articles of the Declaration. Our multilateral system is grounded in an understanding of our interconnectedness. Without solidarity, ladies and gentlemen, our commitments towards one another, towards the future, are a mechanical obligation. But solidarity goes much further, it goes to the fabric of our societies, what makes us human.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Assembly, taking place in the middle of a global conflict, is bringing together a record number of office holders. Over **X** Speakers and Deputy Speakers have travelled, including from regions of conflict, to engage in dialogue for peace today, and for tomorrow. And many who could not travel were restricted by circumstance rather than choice.

Dear friends, creating a more optimistic, peaceful and just future for our children starts with making good decisions today, and we, national lawmakers and community leaders, have a role to play here. This incredible turnout in Istanbul shows courage and solidarity and tells me clearly that we are motivated to work for a more peaceful and just world. It is on us to ensure that decisions taken today, for current generations, also work for the wellbeing of future generations.

There is a proverb I like very much, and I would like to conclude with this, as a word of encouragement. If, like me, you feel that sometimes the weight of the problems facing us is bigger than any solution we could offer, then I ask you to remember: *if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.*

I wish you all fruitful deliberations. Thank you.