



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong Secretary General of the IPU

IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians
Advancing parity: Breaking the barriers of gender stereotypes and negative social norms

Belgrade, 2 June 2026

Madam President of the National Assembly,
Madam Minister Paunovic,
Madam President of the IPU,
Madam Secretary General-elect,
Madam President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians,
Distinguished Commissioner for the Protection of Equality,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Dear colleagues and friends,

Allow me first to express my sincere gratitude to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, and to its President Ana Brnabić, for hosting this important Conference.

It is such a pleasure to be back in Belgrade.

The city has a special place in the recent history of the IPU. In 2019, we held here the 141st IPU Assembly and marked on the same occasion the 130th anniversary of our Organization. The Belgrade Declaration adopted then focused on Strengthening International Law: Parliamentary Roles and Mechanisms, and the Contribution of Regional Cooperation.

The importance of international law was clear then. It is even clearer now.

At a time of multiple conflicts, polarization and growing disregard for multilateralism, our interparliamentary community must reaffirm the importance of a rights-based global order. International law does not live only in treaties or courtrooms. It must be carried into national life through legislation, budgets, oversight, accountability and political will. It must be at the heart of parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue. It must be centered on people and grounded in human rights.

Today, we return to Belgrade with a connected purpose.

We are here to advance gender parity in parliaments and to confront the stereotypes and negative social norms that still stand in its way. This too is about turning commitments into reality: the commitments of the CEDAW Convention, of the Beijing Platform for Action, and of the democratic mandate of parliaments themselves.

Dear participants,

This Conference is the result of the pioneering work of the IPU and its Members.

The Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians is a clear example of how important the women's movement at the IPU is.

Last year, in Mexico, the Conference proved its transformative value. I witnessed the momentum generated there. I saw a parliamentary demand become an institutional direction. The Plan of Action

for Gender Parity in Parliaments was not the end of a Conference. It was the beginning of shared responsibility.

Our task now is to carry this momentum forward.

And Serbia is such an important place to continue this conversation.

Today, women hold 37.6 per cent of seats in the National Assembly of Serbia. This level of representation reflects the importance of well-designed quotas, political will and institutional commitment. It is also a strong foundation on which to continue building women's participation, leadership and gender-sensitive parliamentary practice, until parity becomes the norm.

By hosting this Conference, the Serbian National Assembly demonstrates that it remains committed to sustaining its efforts and carrying others along.

Dear participants,

This Conference also takes place at an important moment for international standards.

In 2024, the CEDAW Committee adopted General Recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. It affirmed parity as a principle of governance and as a driver of transformative change.

The IPU proudly accompanied the Committee in the development of this General Recommendation, bringing data, experience and expertise into the process. This culminated last year in Mexico in the adoption of the Plan of Action for Gender Parity in Parliaments.

As the Committee advances its work towards General Recommendation No. 41 on gender stereotypes, the relevance of this year's Conference is clear. Parity cannot be achieved only by numbers. It also requires changing the social norms, expectations and attitudes that define who is entitled to lead.

Serbia is therefore another milestone in our longstanding partnership with the CEDAW Committee, advancing standards and promoting parliamentary action.

Dear participants,

This Conference has a special meaning for me.

As I come towards the end of my mandate as Secretary General of the IPU, I can say without hesitation that gender equality has been one of the causes closest to my heart. I have never considered it a side issue. I have never considered it a women's issue alone.

We have worked to make this commitment a reality. We have undertaken pioneering research into the prevalence and responses to sexism and violence against women. And we have affirmed that this scourge needs to be met with zero tolerance: within our Organization, in parliaments and beyond. We have worked to make gender-sensitive parliaments a clear institutional objective for us and our Members. And we have affirmed parity as a benchmark of democratic governance.

As Chair of the Global Board of the International Gender Champions, I have seen time and again that institutions change when leaders are prepared to challenge habits that exclude. This requires courage. It requires consistency. It requires refusing to treat discrimination as normal, even when it is old, familiar or convenient.

This brings me to the role of men.

It is encouraging to see so many men in this room, working with women in this cause. Gender equality is of course about promoting women's leadership. But just as importantly, it is about courageous men willing to use their voice and influence to help change the institutions of which they are part.

I say this from personal conviction: feminism is not a dividing line between women and men. It is a bridge towards a more equal, more respectful and more democratic society.

And let me be clear: men lose nothing when women rise. Democracy gains. Parliaments gain. Society gains.

We must work hand in hand as allies, as feminists, and as responsible democratic leaders.

This means speaking out when women are harassed, challenging stereotypes before they become practice, and supporting women's leadership not only in speeches, but in nominations, appointments, resources and decisions.

This is the spirit of the IPU campaign, *Achieving gender equality, action by action*.

The campaign reminds us that change is built through concrete steps. It comes through parity laws. It comes through quotas, through action plans, through gender-sensitive parliamentary practices. It comes through safe working environments. It comes through budgets, oversight and accountability.

And it also comes through speaking out against gender-based inequality and violence whenever and wherever we see it.

That is Action 10 of the campaign. It may sound simple, but it is often where change begins.

Speak out in your parliament. Speak out in your party. Speak out online. Speak out when stereotypes are presented as jokes, when violence is treated as politics, and when women are told to wait their turn.

Let this Conference send a clear message from Belgrade to the world: parity is not a favour, nor a slogan. It is a democratic duty, and it is time to deliver.

Thank you.