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# Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Towards a community of practice: responding to intimidation of public officials

Geneva, 25 June 2026

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the IPU for this meeting on “Towards a community of practice: responding to intimidation of public officials.”

This subject goes to the heart of the IPU’s mandate. Parliaments can only fulfil their democratic role if their members are able to speak, deliberate, legislate and engage with citizens freely and without fear. Strong criticism, public protest and political disagreement are essential to democracy. Intimidation, harassment and violence are not.

The IPU has worked on these issues for many years, particularly through the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which has examined cases of MPs facing threats, arbitrary detention, attacks and other violations since 1976. We have also documented sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament, showing how abuse can be used to discourage participation and silence voices. The work we are discussing today builds on both strands. It focuses on intimidation by members of the public, and on what this means for the functioning of parliament as an institution.

We began this project because many of us could see a worrying pattern. Incidents were making headlines in different parts of the world. MPs were reporting more abuse online, more threats, greater concern for their families and, in some cases, changes to the way they carried out their mandate. But we lacked the comparative evidence needed to understand the scale of the problem, its forms, who was most affected, and what parliaments could do about it.

Since then, the IPU has carried out five national case studies, in Argentina, Benin, Italy, Malaysia and the Netherlands. We also conducted a global survey of parliamentarians and an institutional survey of parliaments. In total, 519 parliamentarians contributed to this research.

The findings are striking. Overall, 71 per cent of respondents reported having experienced violence by members of the public, online, offline, or both. Online abuse is now the dominant form of intimidation. It is often recurrent, sometimes daily, and it does not stay online. It affects how MPs engage with citizens, how they use social media, how safe they feel in public spaces and how their families experience political life.

The findings also show that intimidation is not experienced in the same way by everyone. Women parliamentarians, minority MPs and others with compounded vulnerabilities are often targeted through sexualized, identity-based or deeply personal abuse. This is not incidental. It can be designed to humiliate, isolate or drive people out of public life.

The consequences go well beyond individual safety and well-being. Intimidation affects who speaks, who stays silent, who enters politics, who leaves politics and what views are heard in public debate. It can produce self-censorship, withdrawal from public engagement, stress, anxiety and changes to daily routines and security arrangements. Ultimately, it can narrow democratic space.

This meeting is therefore about moving from evidence to practice. We are here to compare experiences across countries and across public-facing roles, including parliamentarians, journalists, judges, lawyers,

civil society actors, researchers and security practitioners. We want to identify what has worked, what has failed, and what practical steps institutions can take to prevent, respond to and mitigate intimidation.

I am especially grateful that MPs from three of our case-study countries are with us today, together with colleagues from other parliaments and other professions facing similar pressures. Your experience will help ensure that this discussion remains concrete, honest and useful.

This is also, for me, a special moment. It is the last but one official IPU meeting that I have the honour to open before my mandate ends on 30 June. I am glad that it is devoted to a challenge so central to democracy and to the protection of those who serve it.

Thank you, and I wish you a frank and productive exchange.