



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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153rd IPU Assembly

Arusha,
United Republic of Tanzania
5–9 October 2026



Arusha Communiqué

Enhancing good governance and empowering communities through inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all

***Endorsed by the 153rd IPU Assembly
(Arusha, 9 October 2026)***

We, parliamentarians from around the world, gathered at the 153rd IPU Assembly in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, reaffirm that good governance and community empowerment are mutually reinforcing and are key to building trust in public institutions and to promoting the welfare and development of peaceful societies.

Effective, accountable, inclusive and transparent institutions create the conditions for people to exercise their rights and participate in decisions that affect their lives. At the same time, empowered communities bring lived experience, knowledge and innovation that can help institutions respond more effectively to people's needs. Community engagement is a powerful means to build links between people, whether at a local level or within other groups, including underrepresented and marginalized groups. Democracy begins in the community and is strengthened when people's voices are connected to decision-making at every level.

Parliaments have a responsibility to bridge the gap between communities and institutions, as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. In the face of growing pressures – including rapid technological developments, violence and conflicts, widening inequalities, rollbacks on human rights and gender equality, and overlapping social, economic, climate-related and environmental crises – we believe our role, and indeed our priority, is to invest in efforts and action that build inclusivity, trust and opportunities for all.

First, we affirm that parliamentary work needs to be grounded in people's realities. The true test of good governance is what it delivers in people's lives, so as to ensure equal opportunities for all. We therefore call for laws, policies and budgets to be informed by diverse forms of evidence, including scientific and quantitative data, official statistics, local and community knowledge, and people's lived experiences. We especially emphasize the need for parliamentarians to be present in and available to the communities they represent, particularly those that are remote or affected by crisis.

Acknowledging the variety of lived realities, and in particular those of people in vulnerable and marginalized situations, is crucial. Vulnerability is context-specific, dynamic and often multidimensional, and addressing it requires an understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts in which people and communities live and what barriers exist to equal participation in society and public life. We emphasize that connecting different forms of evidence can help parliaments to appreciate how resource allocations, laws and policies affect people in practice, as well as to identify unintended consequences and respond to emerging needs. Parliamentary work should address both the immediate impacts and the underlying causes of vulnerability, including discriminatory laws, unequal access to resources and services, and social norms, so as to create enabling conditions for populations in vulnerable and marginalized situations to access opportunities and exercise their rights.

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Second, we underscore the importance of accountability, transparency and integrity, and of institutions listening, responding to people's concerns and demonstrating that engagement can lead to change. Trust between people and institutions lies at the heart of good governance and community empowerment. In order to build that trust – and foster stronger links and genuine partnerships with the communities they serve – parliaments need to take concerted action to prevent and address corruption; uphold a culture of integrity in their work; examine current challenges and, where needed, engage in reforming and developing mechanisms for greater transparency and ethics in politics and in the wider public sector; build internal capacity for stronger oversight; and work in partnership with other key stakeholders.

We emphasize the importance of communities being informed and engaging with the institutions that represent them. Civic education has a vital role to play in strengthening people's understanding of democracy and of their rights and responsibilities, as well as of parliamentary roles and responsibilities. Parliaments should work to make their institutional and decision-making processes understandable, accessible and relevant to society at large. Such understanding contributes to a culture of accountability. When introduced early, civic education can help encourage the participation of young people in public life. Civic education should also be extended to include training for community leaders on legislative and budgetary processes.

We stress that misinformation and disinformation undermine trust and evidence-based decision-making, disempowering people and weakening social cohesion. Parliaments should serve as role models: communicating in accessible and culturally appropriate ways, providing reliable sources of information, strengthening public resilience to misinformation and disinformation, and promoting respectful and evidence-based public debate.

We acknowledge the specific challenges of fragile, conflict and crisis settings, where institutions and communities may face heightened levels of mistrust, exclusion and insecurity. We call for responses in such contexts to be adapted to local realities and developed in consultation with affected communities, including displaced persons, survivors of conflict and violent extremism, and those impacted by natural disasters and climate-related events, among others. Their knowledge and experiences should inform recovery and peacebuilding efforts. Victims of displacement, conflict and violence should be recognized not only as beneficiaries of protection, but also as contributors to more resilient, inclusive and cohesive societies.

Third, we call for parliaments to become more open institutions that look beyond traditional public engagement mechanisms and build stronger partnerships with communities. We also call for parliaments to be more inclusive, which means ensuring the participation of both citizens and other members of the community – including migrants, refugees and stateless persons – and creating mechanisms for ongoing exchanges to identify needs and priorities, develop solutions and provide feedback on their implementation.

As members of parliament, we have the power and capacity to convene and facilitate dialogue in communities, to build bridges across political and social divides, and to contribute to the peaceful resolution of tensions. We acknowledge the need to build our skills in terms of outreach and to develop creative and practical ways of bringing people's concerns, experiences and aspirations into formal parliamentary processes, so that communities can engage with the decisions that affect them.

New technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), are changing how people interact with public institutions and exercise their rights. They are creating new opportunities for participation and access to information and public services, and are especially important for engaging young people; but they may also contribute to widening digital divides and inequalities, including gender biases, as well as facilitating the spread of misinformation and disinformation and undermining human rights. Parliaments should hold open and informed discussions about the opportunities and challenges presented by AI and other digital technologies, and develop guidelines and frameworks setting out how such technologies can be used responsibly to enhance public outreach and engagement, while safeguarding data protection and data sovereignty.

The diversity of society also needs to be reflected in the composition of parliaments. We call attention to those who, owing to persistent barriers, still struggle to have their voices heard in decision-making processes and to access leadership positions, including women, young people, persons living with disabilities, and marginalized or other underrepresented groups. We are concerned that progress in the representation of women and youth in parliaments is stalling. We need to remain vigilant and pursue efforts by building conducive legal frameworks, providing incentives, mentorship and skills-building support, and addressing cultural and social biases that can limit access to decision-making.

Fourth, we commit to sustaining our efforts for good governance and community empowerment by addressing long-term challenges. We see parliaments as important spaces for anticipating the future, bringing together and debating diverse views to build common ground for generations to come. We also value communities as sources of innovation and locally owned solutions. We remain convinced that parliamentary cooperation and peer learning will continue to serve as critical channels for sharing effective approaches to community engagement, thus strengthening social cohesion, evidence-informed decision-making and the governance of emerging challenges arising from technological, social, economic and environmental change.

Having identified these opportunities, we pledge to:

Ground parliamentary work in people's lived realities:

- Put evidence-based decision-making at the heart of parliamentary work by strengthening internal capacity to analyse and use data, ensuring the availability of disaggregated data and developing partnerships that facilitate access to, and the generation of, diverse forms of data and evidence.
- Assess the differentiated impacts of laws, policies and budgets – particularly on women, youth, and groups experiencing multiple forms of exclusion and vulnerability – both before and after their implementation, and strengthen relevant indicators and mechanisms to support parliamentary oversight.
- More systematically integrate local knowledge, first-hand accounts and lived experiences into the work of parliamentary committees and other parliamentary bodies, bearing in mind that communities are a source of ideas, solutions and innovation.
- Develop, test and evaluate innovative public engagement approaches and establish mechanisms to communicate how public input has been considered and translated into action.

Strengthen the accountability, transparency and integrity of parliamentary institutions:

- Strengthen mechanisms to prevent and address corruption, including through: stronger standards for the conduct and accountability of parliamentarians; strengthened oversight mechanisms and capacity; closer collaboration between parliaments and audit institutions, other oversight bodies, local authorities and civil society; and more transparent and accessible public information on parliamentary decision-making and the use of public resources.
- Promote public understanding of democratic institutions by investing in civic education, ensuring equal opportunities for boys and girls in all their diversity to engage with democratic institutions from an early age, and expanding opportunities for participation in community-level institutions and local decision-making.
- Ensure that accurate, responsible and evidence-based information is used in parliamentary debates and communications, strengthen capacities to identify and address misinformation and disinformation both within parliament and in wider society, and build public resilience through accessible information, media and information literacy, and respectful public debate.
- Strengthen parliamentary capacities to engage with new technologies, including AI, and to harness the opportunities they present to enhance public participation and access to information, while anticipating and addressing associated risks and putting in place safeguards where needed.

Work to make parliaments more open and inclusive:

- Map patterns of underrepresentation in parliaments using past and current data, and identify the intersecting structural, social and institutional barriers that limit the equal participation and representation of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other groups that have historically been underrepresented, with a view to developing practical measures to address such inequalities.
- Provide training for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on dialogue, mediation and partnership-building, and establish frameworks for structured and sustained collaboration between parliamentarians, communities and other stakeholders.
- Tailor parliamentary communication approaches and messages to the specific contexts and preferred channels of different groups, involve community leaders in developing and disseminating locally relevant information, and strengthen outreach to communities that are remote, underserved or at risk of exclusion from public decision-making processes.
- Consider how the responsible use of AI and other digital tools within parliaments can help enhance community outreach and engagement, and develop capacities, guidelines, frameworks and oversight mechanisms in that regard.
- Consider creating spaces for regular dialogue with communities in order to collect input throughout parliamentary processes and provide feedback on parliamentary work.

Sustain efforts to address long-term challenges:

- Strengthen parliamentary mechanisms for addressing long-term and intergenerational challenges, including through foresight, long-term impact assessment, and systematic consideration of the interests of future generations in legislation, budgeting and oversight.
- Consider establishing or strengthening parliamentary committees of the future.

We express our gratitude to the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania for bringing us together for this important debate on good governance and community empowerment. We pledge to take this Communiqué back to our respective parliaments and to disseminate it as widely as possible at the national and local levels.

We call upon the IPU to continue supporting our efforts through its existing programmes, initiatives, mechanisms and tools, including the *Indicators for Democratic Parliaments* and the *Plan of action for gender parity in parliaments*.

Together, we reaffirm our commitment to shaping a future with the people, not simply for the people; to listening to the communities we represent; and, in exercising our legislative, budgetary and oversight functions, to putting their needs and priorities at the heart of parliamentary action.