



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Opening speech by the President of the IPU, Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron

Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

Mr. McGuinty, President of the IPU Canadian Group,
Mr. Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU,
Mr. Erskine-Smith, Member of the Board of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU,

Distinguished Colleagues and friends,

I am really pleased to be in Ottawa today and to open this Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. Welcome to all of participants! I think the opening of this conference is one of my first official undertakings as IPU President. The first one was less than a week ago in Bonn so I am very excited to be here and to be particularly with young parliamentarians. I started out in politics when I was actually 15 years old (so now you know my age), I am also proud to be a young parliamentarian. I started in politics at 15, I was a MP at 21 and I became a senator and President of the Foreign Affairs Committee five years ago. I am the second woman IPU President but also the youngest President in IPU history. I believed this is a great challenge, a huge responsibility and, of course, an honour and now I have the responsibility and a duty to represent not only all the IPU but we really need to put a special emphasis on young parliamentarians. That is all our responsibility and we are going to do it well.

I would like first and foremost to thank our hosts, the Parliament of Canada, for organizing the Conference this year and, in particular, David McGuinty and Nathaniel Erskine-Smith for all their efforts, as well as the Honourable Speakers of the House of Commons and the Senate.

The first IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians took place in 2014 and has become the biggest event for rallying young men and women MPs from all around the world. Its objective is to ensure that young parliamentarians have a dedicated platform to shape their contributions to international debate. The IPU works to raise the voice of youth and ensure that their concerns and interests are articulated and voiced. We have a lot of work to do. If we look at IPU statistics, only 1.9% of the world's parliamentarians are younger than 30 years old. However, half of the world's population is younger than 30. In addition, 75 per cent of countries do not allow people younger than 30 years old to be a candidate. This is not only a lack of representation, this is a democracy deficit and we need to change that. We are asking youth to be politicians, we are constantly asking them to vote for us; we are asking them to think that politics is a very good issue that they should be involved in but on the other hand, when we are telling them and complaining about their disinterest, we are seeking their endorsement. We need to change that. We need to understand that politics need to encompass greater innovations, representation, openness and transparency and, of course, policies also need to change. We need to understand that the 21st century is here and a change is needed.

We need to understand that communications and policies, everything needs to be faster. What the young people are expecting is the same immediate response that they are getting from social media and it is almost impossible to get immediate responses from politics. So, we need to change, we need to adapt and we need to respond. That is what they are expecting from us. We need to address legal protests; we need to address a lot of changes in our relations. Not only to include and to allow persons in their 30's to be candidates. We need also to understand that the reality is changing and we need to design new policies, we need to design projects with age perspectives for all people. We need to understand that gender is important: we need to understand again new challenges that this new century is asking from us. If we see for example what is happening around the world, lots of populations distrust their institutions, 60 per cent of people in advanced economies have left for foreign incomes. Of course, income inequalities is a reality in almost all the world. The kind of leadership that we need, should be strong. We need to understand that inclusion is the real challenge for this century. If we don't understand that SDGs are not going to be more than a narrative. If we don't understand that we need to fight inequalities in order to have a sustainable world, we are not understanding our moral responsibilities. Therefore, inclusion is the real challenge and how we are going to fight inequalities.

The first thing that we need to recalibrate is migration. In our world, 27 million young people leave their countries of birth to seek education or employment and, in some cases, only to preserve their own lives. What are we going to do ? We, our Global Conference, are migrants and refugees. What are we going to say ? 27 million young persons who are forced to leave their country : do we have a voice ? Do we have a real concern for those people ? Migration should not make a young person go away. We need to understand migration not only as a security issue, that is the worse point of view and I think the most dangerous. We need to understand that populism can be a real threat to these 27 million young immigrants, refugees or displaced people. As parliamentarians, we need to understand migration as a huge responsibility and it has to do with the laws that we are going to decide. It has to do with the policies that are governments are making, and of course also with the budget that we decide. So we have also an important responsibility: it is not only a governmental matter. At the IPU, we addressed migration issues during the 133rd Assembly in Geneva in 2015. There we called for implementing a protective legal framework for ensuring fairness, non-discrimination and respect for the human rights of immigrants. We called for education and ensuring access to employment, health and social services. Of course, we also asked for better policies and specific legislation to prohibit discrimination and avoid xenophobia.

There is another challenge: inclusiveness in our own economies. If we don't understand that we need more equal societies, we are not understanding anything about justice and building a better and stronger future for the next generation. Economic inclusiveness is a sine qua non. There are today globally 71 million unemployed young people. That is a responsibility again for governments but also for us, the parliamentarians. Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 8 calls for reducing inequalities both within and between our countries. We did not only think this issue as somehow a dream, we need to understand that we need to design new legislation. First, for economic policies, of course, to allow better salaries and social security. We need to combine our observations and make sure the tax regime is sufficiently progressive. We need to understand that we are responsible for the decision on taxes but also subsidies and social policies, health and education. At this Conference, we will explore more measures and means to ensure that migrants and refugees, indigenous and ethnic minorities, marginalized and economically vulnerable people and more broadly women and youth, can be better included in society, in the economy and in politics.

It is not a coincidence that this Conference will explore these important matters here in Canada, a country that represents so much hope for so many people. There is today what we can call a Canadian dream! A dream that seems to be accessible for so many families and for so many young people from around the globe at a time when more and more borders, boundaries and walls are regrettably being erected.

I am sure that with your help today we are going to have very productive dialogue. We are going to learn new ideas that I truly believed we need to move forward implementation. At the IPU, we received a lot of tools and ideas. We shared best practices from all around the world and countries experiences. We need to use these ideas, this advice to go back to our countries and change the reality. The only way that the world is going to change is if we really take responsibility in our hands and change our mentality in our countries to work directly with our constituencies. We are really privileged: we are the ones between what is happening at the international level. We can look to the UN, for example, and see that they are taking a lot of decisions, the one that are going to be taken for the global compents, but we have also, not only access to that important international agenda, we have also the importance of opportunities to go back to their reality, to be the link between that international policy and the people. If we understand that to be a good politician, a person should be at the center of all our decisions, laws, budget, policies and accountabilities, I am sure that parliamentarians of the world will create the planet that we really want to have for the 21st century.

Thank you very much and again congratulations to Canada for hosting this Conference.