

# **Remarks by Gabriela Cuevas Barron President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**Parliamentary Conference on the WTO  
on the occasion of the Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference  
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Thank you very much to the parliamentary authorities including, Mrs. Gabriela Michetti, President of the Senate of the Nation, Mr. Federico Pinedo, Provisional President of the Senate, and Dr. Emilio Monzo, President of the Chamber of Deputies, for the organization of this conference and your warm hospitality.

Thank you to the Organizing Committee of the Argentine National Congress, which has demonstrated a perfect osmosis with the Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.

And of course, thank you very much to the members of this presidium. Thank you to the Foreign Affairs Minister for all your help, and of course Mr. Faurie for being here with us. And Ambassador Xavier Carim who is here and the European Parliamentarian Madam McGuinness.

International flows of tradable goods and services are probably greater today than ever before. And yet, paradoxically, despite the volume of such trade, strong, powerful voices are being raised against globalization and for trade barriers between countries. That approach, in my view, can only undermine prosperity and development among the peoples they represent and govern.

It is up to us as parliamentarians and representatives to respond to the needs of our people, and probably even to explain what is happening in greater detail. We have failed as politicians and parliamentarians to promote a clear understanding of the advantages of free trade. We have also failed to promote greater inclusion through trade practices. This Parliamentary Conference, which has been held since 2003, is an ideal opportunity to discuss what practices to adopt and what examples to follow to best align with the World Trade Organization, better understand the debates and agreements being negotiated there, and find ways to extend the benefits of its work, and that of other such institutions, to our constituents.

Our discussions should explore ways to achieve more just and equitable global trade – trade that helps us meet the needs and demands of our people. This Parliamentary Conference on the WTO brings us together as legislators – as members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as has traditionally been the case, but also of the European Parliament, the World Trade Organization, and many other institutions attending today as observers.

We must also look at ways to improve the effectiveness of discussion and action within the WTO as well as the transparency and inclusiveness of proceedings and dialogue on trade matters among governments, parliaments and civil society. A particularly important issue is how to enhance the capacity of parliamentarians, particularly in technical areas, to address trade, financial and other related issues. And this includes having better informed discussions, from the parliamentary perspective, on matters pertaining to WTO.

We are the institutions best positioned to incorporate the foreign policy objectives of our countries as well as of major global agreements into the every-day agendas of our countries. It is up to us to transpose such global agreements into our national legislation so that they can have real impact on national budgets and feed effectively into public policy. Trade and globalization pose very important challenges, but if we as legislators can take part in those processes, the results will surely be much better.

One of the major challenges posed by globalization and free trade is growing inequality. While ideally, free trade provides a means to benefit consumers and citizens, the reality, in virtually all countries, has been greater inequality, with technology steadily replacing labour and a financial system still falling short of being truly inclusive. The benefits of trade have simply not been widely felt in our countries, and that is why foreign trade policies are being so vehemently challenged – they make such an easy target for populist rhetoric of different stripes, cutting across ideology.

We now see a push for national barriers re-entering our political discourse, with an obvious impact on trade policy. The result has been increasing, often unsustainable protectionism that can only prolong what has been a particularly adverse economic climate for the poorest members of society.

Free trade is not the cause of unemployment, which most often stems from demographic policies. Unemployment is also a function of technological change, which cannot be halted, and of our failure to make trade truly inclusive: that is, to include more women, more small and medium-sized

enterprises, more cooperatives. That is how our people can enjoy the benefits of free trade and, above all, a better quality of life.

To believe that technological changes can be stopped by decree is to deny reality. What we need to make a real difference is the capacity to discuss and address the everyday challenges of globalization with creative and innovative solutions.

We must also be able to shape more effective national policies: domestic industrial policies, to be sure, but also economic and trade policies, based on a clearer understanding of the interconnections that exist among virtually all countries on our planet. And in shaping those policies, we must always remain clear about our responsibilities toward the environment, toward the poor, and toward the socioeconomic realities particular to each country.

Over the next two days we will have the chance for well-informed, transparent and honest discussion, to help us understand as well as defend a multilateral approach to trade practices. The aim must be for people to benefit from free trade and from a much more inclusive system.

Another great challenge is balancing transparency against privacy. As giant systems seek ways to gather more and more information about us, we as individuals have the right to keep our personal information private. Our attention must therefore extend – and more than ever in this digital era – to the multiple arenas in which consumers and their personal data require protection.

The essence of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals – what they are essentially asking of us – is to leave no one behind. If managed effectively, trade between nations can become one of the best tools for accomplishing that mission, and for making our societies more inclusive. If mismanaged, however, it can only deepen inequality.

We as legislators have a great responsibility. We can contribute to the discussions being held and decisions being taken – and especially their implementation – in the World Trade Organization. One such discussion concerns the Trade Facilitation Agreement now coming to our countries and parliaments for application. It comes with a set of processes for analysis, discussion, ratification and implementation and thus offers another opportunity for parliamentarians around the world to make a difference.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union will be part of this effort, organizing workshops, holding meetings, and conducting awareness campaigns to highlight the agreement's importance and examine the technical issues that

will be key to effective implementation. Today, we as parliamentarians have the opportunity to engage in profound dialogue and share experiences, both in our countries and globally, concerning ways to make international trade more just, more equitable and more inclusive and better account for our work to those who have entrusted it to us.

I hope this meeting, over these next two days, will elicit dialogue and shared perspectives but also result in action and real change.

Let me also express our sincerest appreciation to the Senate and Congress of Argentina, for organizing this event; to the European Parliament and the entire staff of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for their work to make this meeting a reality; and of course, very specially, to all who have had to travel to be here with us. We hope that today's substance-filled meeting will mark the start of many such events in Argentina going forward.

Thank you very much.