



141st IPU Assembly

**Belgrade (Serbia)
13-17 October 2019**



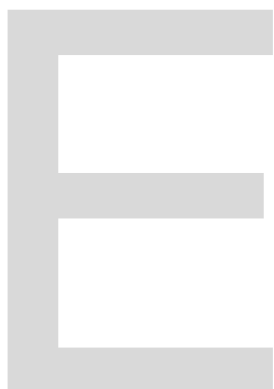
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Inaugural address IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron

Your Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia,
Ms. Maja Gojković, Speaker of the National Assembly,

It is my great honour to address the inaugural ceremony of the 141st IPU Assembly. As the IPU marks its 130th anniversary, it is a time of both celebration and sober reflection for us, as parliamentarians – a time to take stock of the strength of our institutions and what they have achieved, and to steel ourselves for the challenges ahead.

First, as we gather here in Belgrade, I would like to thank, on behalf of all of us present, our hosts – the Republic of Serbia and its National Assembly – for organizing this Assembly. This is the first IPU Assembly in a European country outside of Geneva in 20 years. It is actually the second time that Belgrade is hosting the IPU Assembly. The 52nd Assembly was held here in 1963. In the intervening 56 years, the city has lived through turbulent times. It has emerged as a dynamic and creative city, embracing influences from both East and West, and we hope that this spirit will frame and feed into our discussions. We should draw inspiration from this regenerated, vibrant riverside neighbourhood, which at once harks back to the past and looks to the future.



#IPU141

Our Assemblies are a unique opportunity to bring the global parliamentary community together, seeing past national differences to our common experiences and challenges. After all, never has the IPU been bigger, stronger, more global, more diverse and more relevant. As always, we have a packed agenda and I urge you to seize every opportunity to discuss, share experiences and learn from each other, formally and informally. This approach has stood the test of time and shown its true value over the decades.

I am encouraged by the high level of participation in this Assembly, including over 750 parliamentarians and close to 80 Speakers of Parliament from some 150 national parliaments. I am very much looking forward to the second edition of the Speakers' Dialogue on governance taking place on Tuesday afternoon in the context of our Assembly, and am confident that it will bring a robust contribution to our preparations for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers - organized in Vienna during the third week of August 2020, in close cooperation with the Austrian Parliament and the United Nations.

We are indeed privileged to be here – to hold open, frank discussions and engage in parliamentary diplomacy. Parliamentary diplomacy is about building bridges of dialogue, understanding and cooperation within and between nations. We have a duty to defend parliaments as open, representative, accountable and effective institutions – as a space in which all voices are heard and respected. Only then can fair, lasting solutions be found.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IPU's core mission is to promote parliamentary democracy and,

- One month ago, on 15 September, we celebrated the International Day of Democracy. This means improving women's and young people's representation in parliament. The IPU is at the forefront of efforts to boost women's and youth political empowerment. The #Not In My Parliament parity debate at this Assembly will focus on parliamentary action to tackle sexism and violence in politics. And the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young

Parliamentarians will also be meeting during this Assembly to pursue their far-reaching agendas.

- Next year is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – an agenda for women’s empowerment that set out to remove the obstacles to women’s active participation in all spheres by ensuring that women play a full and equal role in decision-making. Twenty five years on, there is cause to both celebrate and lament. If we look at the parliamentary sphere alone, although the number of women MPs has risen steadily over the **past 25 years**, it is still a sad fact that fewer than one in four parliamentarians globally is a woman. For example, in the region I come from – Latin America – **30 per cent of MPs are women but we still have a long way to go to reach** gender parity. Similarly, **half the world's population is under 30**, but only two per cent of MPs are in that age group. The workshop on gender and youth quotas will tackle these issues head-on and explore what concrete action can be taken.

Our workshop marking the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the world’s most widely ratified treaty - will zoom in on noteworthy national and international initiatives that have been developed, including with the help of parliaments, to give children a voice and to take their interests into account. Empowering youth is also the theme of this year’s Future Policy Award, which recognizes laws and policies that create better living conditions for current and future generations with a view to raising global awareness of exemplary policies and speeding up policy action. This year the IPU has partnered with the World Future Council and UNDP in support of this initiative, and we are very pleased that the winners of the Future Policy Award will be celebrated here in Belgrade during a special segment of the Assembly on Wednesday afternoon.

Our job and mission is to put people at the center of the decisions.

My fellow parliamentarians,

At this Assembly the subject of our general debate will be strengthening international law through parliamentary roles and mechanisms, which is very fitting in the 70th anniversary year of the Geneva Conventions and our forthcoming panel debate on how parliaments can foster compliance with international humanitarian law. During this Assembly we will also be launching a new handbook for parliamentarians on eliminating forced labour – produced in cooperation with the International Labour Organization. In the context of its centennial anniversary this year, the ILO, with IPU support, has launched the "One for All" campaign for the ratification of its various labour conventions and protocols. The results have been encouraging – 98 "centenary ratifications" by 62 member States – but of course much more remains to be done, particularly in terms of implementation.

The general debate will also focus on the contribution of regional cooperation. It is heartening to see that the tradition of regional parliamentary cooperation at the IPU is going from strength to strength, with an impressive array of increasingly popular and well-attended regional seminars being organized to empower parliamentarians to address the key issues of our time, including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and violent extremism, trade, health, climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 are more relevant than ever. They encompass many areas that are fundamental for the wellbeing and prosperity of the planet and humanity – such as eradicating poverty, empowering women, achieving universal health coverage. We stand at a crossroads; the option of simply carrying on as we have always done is no longer viable. We need a new development paradigm, which brings us back to the parliamentary roles and mechanisms that must be instituted to make that happen. We need to reverse the trend of mistrust in governance structures and people's disenchantment with and alienation from those who represent them. Only then will we leave no one behind.

In this vein, the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights will be working on a resolution on achieving universal health coverage by 2030

that will be submitted to you all at the end of the Assembly. This represents a milestone coming on the heels of the political declaration adopted by Heads of State and Government in New York last month. We trust that we can agree on a parliamentary action plan that will give impetus and drive the vision articulated by the United Nations.

We will be discussing digitalization at the service of responsible consumption and production, as well as preparing for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Chile in December. Meanwhile, we will be working towards a resolution on strengthening peace and security against threats and conflict resulting from climate-related disasters, ready for the next Assembly in April 2020. We are in this effort for the long haul, working on multiple fronts at once. Last but not least, the Standing Committee on UN Affairs will examine the status of interaction between national parliaments and the UN, and set forth a series of recommendations to further enhance this cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Fellow parliamentarians,

Yes, we are here to talk; we are also here to get involved with the hands-on approach of the workshops and other events. But it does not end there. We have a duty to return to our countries and follow through on the commitments and decisions made, to channel what we have heard and learnt into meaningful national action.

Working together, we, parliamentarians, can accomplish our duty of translating international responsibilities into local solutions. If we take as an example the resolution adopted in Doha in April, which called for urgent international action in the wake of Cyclone Idai, some parliaments have indeed stepped up and fulfilled their pledges of material and financial support. But not enough. And that is our reality: it is never enough. But rather than be disheartened, this should spur us on in our everyday work and in our participation at this Assembly. Let us uphold multilateralism as it was originally intended – to represent our peoples, advance their aspirations, and deliver progress and solutions.

I am convinced that multilateralism is where the wider and the more inclusive agreements are generated, where global solutions are designed to address the issues that do not respect borders, and where the most favourable spaces for peace can be found. Multilateralism is also where citizens feel less represented, where the more distant institutions are, and where there is no such thing as mechanisms for accountability; that is why populist voices exalting nationalism and populism are the only ones being heard during the electoral process.

We participate in the Interparliamentary Union because we believe in multilateralism, because we are convinced that parliamentarian diplomacy is the better approach to strengthening international cooperation, because we know that our delegations represent the political and social pluralism of our people, because we know that this institution has the power to transform the world and give results to future generations.

I look forward to interacting with as many of you as possible in the coming days, and I wish you all a very successful and fulfilling Assembly.

Thank you.