



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

**Check against delivery**

## **Speech of Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

**Delivered at the P20 Speakers' Summit**

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I would like to thank the parliamentary authorities of Japan, in particular Ms. Akiko Santo, President of the House of Councillors, for their warm hospitality and the excellent conditions provided for this Speakers' Summit here in beautiful Tokyo. I also warmly thank her for believing in this P20 initiative and ensuring its continuity by hosting this second edition, as per the Speakers' request in Buenos Aires last year. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Japan on its successful G20 presidency.

I am pleased to note, from the high turnout here today, that we are all committed to engaging with and monitoring the G20 in order to make it more accountable and democratic. At the Argentina P20 last year we recognized the need for us parliamentarians to be part of the G20 process for the well-being of our populations, whom we have the imperative mission to represent. Let us remember that parliaments bring all political forces together, not just those that are in government. Our job as P20 is to help implement those decisions of the G20 that deserve our support, but also to shine a light on those decisions that may not be in the best interest of our constituents.

For several years now, the IPU has been playing the role of global parliamentary convener: bringing together MPs from select parliamentary committees on the occasion world conferences, identifying and sharing good practices and model legislation, forging and following up on parliamentary plans of action to tackle global challenges, and bringing a parliamentary voice to international deliberations.

We feel very strongly that, in order to bridge the democracy gap in international relations and ensure greater transparency and accountability in global governance, parliaments and parliamentarians need to be involved in the main international processes through constructive debate that generates action-orientated recommendations. That is why our engagement in the G20 process is so important.

Dear colleagues,

Our world today is facing difficult times – politically, economically, socially and environmentally. The challenges, far from diminishing, are piling up. We only need to look at the events of recent weeks – punctuated by violent demonstrations around the world and resulting in tragic loss of life.

We have to face facts: these different socio-political movements illustrate a collective unease that reflects on our primary function of representation and our legitimacy, namely people's profound disillusionment with their elected representatives. And with good reason.

People feel that they are not being heard, let alone represented, calling into question our primary function as parliamentarians. This disillusion extends to politics as a whole, which no longer appeals to people. How can we ensure inclusive and participatory governance when so many people no longer feel concerned by our actions or distrust them altogether?

The current socio-political unrest should cause us, as parliamentarians, to make an honest assessment of our own actions and results. Beyond that, we need to come up with a clear plan for the years ahead.

As a first consideration, we need to recognize that our actions in general, and more specifically in the context of G20, are not as dynamic as they should be.

We need to mobilize political will around a common purpose, and identify and implement effective solutions, before it is too late. This can only be done with the full engagement of our national parliaments, and under the leadership of our common organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Ten years ago, G20 members met to find urgent and lasting solutions to the financial crisis that engulfed the world. But ten years later, we realize that much more needs to be done, and done differently.

Austerity policies were unevenly applied: in many of our countries budget cuts and tax increases penalized the very people who had lost the most from the crisis while being much more lenient toward those who were most responsible for it. Meant for the short term, austerity policies have not only been extended in time but have become increasingly tough and deeply affected our populations. It is obvious that appropriate solutions are still lacking.

As UNCTAD put it, what is needed is "legislation providing for comprehensive capital controls [that] allows policymakers to act quickly and avoid lengthy debates and procedures, especially during surges of capital inflows when the build-up of macroeconomic and financial vulnerabilities is greatest and when the political forces against regulation tend to be strongest".<sup>1</sup>

We should all be concerned about the state of the global economy, with its social and environmental imbalances. Growth is low, while public and private debt and inequalities are on the rise. Substantial challenges are hampering the economic prospects of the near and distant future. Developing countries face debt sustainability challenges. 40 per cent of low-income countries are facing a high risk of debt distress or are in debt distress. Meanwhile, official development assistance is declining. There is an urgent need for structural reforms. We need to rethink our economies from a green economy perspective. Economic policies must look beyond gross domestic product and be guided by more comprehensive measures of progress and human wellbeing.

Democracy means that we must promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, but it also needs to tangibly deliver better lives for our people. Worldwide, we see job insecurity and stagnant incomes for the majority coexist with an unprecedented concentration of income and wealth in a small segment of the population and with rapid environmental degradation. Our countries have all committed to ensure decent jobs, whereby workers enjoy basic rights and protections, such as a living wage, a healthy work environment, and social benefits such as income support during periods of unemployment.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Trade and Development Report 2019, Financing a Global Green New Deal*

However, according to the World Social Protection Report 2017-19, only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent, i.e four billion people, are left unprotected.

It is therefore incumbent on us as parliamentarians to work together and with relevant international organizations towards a sound economic and financial environment that supports the real economy of producers and consumers, while penalizing speculation and profiteering, and ensuring a people-centred approach that leaves no one behind.

Anxiety at the prospect of increasing economic insecurity is made worse by the impending threat of environmental breakdown. Our environment is suffering and deteriorating as a result of climate change, over-exploitation of natural resources and rising levels of pollution. The destruction wreaked by natural disasters, such as the hurricane that hit Japan recently, speaks volumes, and reminds us that no one is safe from climate hazards.

I am not saying fatalistically that this is a natural process that will inevitably spell the end for our planet. Climate change is a man-made phenomenon and the solutions are in our hands. We cannot stress enough: we must save the environment – our most precious shared resource as well as the foundation of our economy. And we, parliamentarians, must be at the forefront of this battle.

Increasing trade tensions are having a negative influence on world trade. It is expected that trade growth will slow from 4.6 per cent in 2017 to 2.6 per cent in 2019. But beyond the numbers, the ongoing escalation of trade disputes is a symptom of a dysfunctional trade regime in which too much emphasis was placed on the "free" and not enough on the "fair" aspects of trade policy. We must address concerns about inequalities in the distribution of the profits of global trade, and we must ensure that even the most remote communities in our countries benefit. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, a joint initiative of the IPU and the European Parliament, provides a good framework to re-think the multilateral trading system so that it can effectively work for the people.

Indeed, the problem with globalization today is that it continues to disempower too many people, making their jobs more insecure, putting downward pressure on wages, and making important public services more precarious. It is understandable therefore that many people are looking inward, within their national borders, in the search for solutions. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to listen more carefully to our peoples to figure out their real needs and think of solutions that work.

Demagogy and political rhetoric are not a solution and only make things worse. In this context, 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, and 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 all hands on deck to secure our countries' development. One sure way to do this is to empower women, whose contribution is vital to our economies and environmental sustainability. In our role as legislators, we must work to promote the status of women, to tackle all forms of discrimination against them, and to involve women in all stages of decision-making.

Next year is the 25<sup>th</sup> 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.

Similarly, half the world's population is under 30, but only two per cent of MPs are in that age group. Young people also have a role to play in shaping the society of tomorrow. Their prospects for a better future are sorely lacking. Directionless, they are easy prey for those peddling demagoguery based on exclusion, discrimination and xenophobia – targeting the other as the source of all evil, and failing to recognize that the other contributes to the diversity, plurality and richness of society. Young people from all walks of life should be more involved in political life and in decision-making processes.

Working together, we, parliamentarians, can accomplish our duty of translating international commitments into local solutions. Let us uphold multilateralism as it was originally intended – to represent our peoples, advance their aspirations, and deliver progress and solutions that offer widespread advantages.

Dear colleagues,

It is my belief that our discussions today will help cement our engagement in the G20 process for the wellbeing of our populations.

To ensure efficient implementation of the outcome of our meeting, may I suggest that we all do our homework, which consists in reporting back on the implementation of our Joint Statement by the next P20 Speakers' Summit in 2020. Let's commit to that.

I thank you for your attention.