



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (2020)

First meeting of the Preparatory Committee (Geneva, 8-9 February 2019)

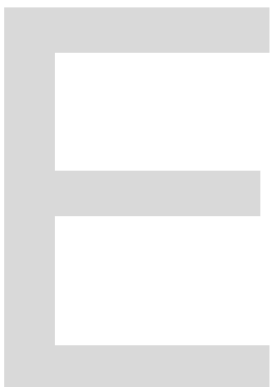
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Background to the World Speakers' Conferences and expected outcomes for 2020

Background

1. The IPU convened the first ever World Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliament in 2000 in close cooperation with the United Nations. The parliamentary leaders met in the United Nations General Assembly Hall on the eve of the Millennium Summit. At a time when multilateralism was seen to be under threat, the focus of the first Conference was to offer political support to the United Nations as the principal instrument of international cooperation.
2. Through their presence at the United Nations Headquarters and in their Declaration—*The Parliamentary Vision for International Cooperation at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*—the Speakers asserted that the multilateral system could no longer dispense with the participation of parliaments. They declared that their ambition was to bring a more manifestly democratic dimension to international decision-making and cooperation. They resolved to ensure that their parliaments contributed more substantively to the work of the United Nations.
3. The first World Conference of Presiding Officers informed the outcome of the UN Millennium Summit itself. In their Millennium Declaration, Heads of State and Government pledged to strengthen the United Nations in a number of ways, including by "strengthening further cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments through their world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in various fields, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights and democracy and gender issues". This, in turn, led to the upgrading of IPU's status at the United Nations from ECOSOC consultative status to permanent observer to the UN General Assembly—with the right to participate in and address UN formal meetings and to circulate official IPU documents.
4. The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held in September 2005 at the UN Headquarters in New York. Again, the Speakers' Conference coincided with a Summit of Heads of State and Government, this time to adopt a set of proposals for reform of the United Nations and to review progress on implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through their Declaration—*Bridging the democracy gap in international relations: A stronger role for parliament*—the Speakers of Parliament issued a strong call for multilateral action for solving global problems, and pledged their support for developing a more strategic and mutually beneficial interaction between the United Nations, the IPU and the global parliamentary community.



5. At the UN Summit that followed shortly thereafter, Heads of State and Government recognized the role and responsibility of parliaments and parliamentarians and called for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the IPU, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of work of the United Nations and to ensuring the effective implementation of UN reform. This, among other things, led to a more formal role and systematic engagement by the IPU in the new UN bodies, such as the Development Cooperation Forum, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.

6. The Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held in July 2010, this time at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Speakers called for greater global democratic accountability for the common good. The time had come, they stated, for an imaginative leap of faith: "Today's multilateral systems should allow for much greater consideration for the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of people everywhere whose voices go unheard." The Speakers expressed support for the United Nations, acknowledged progress in strengthening the institution and urged further reforms. Similarly, they reiterated their support for the IPU as the international body best suited to build a strong relationship between parliaments and the United Nations.

7. This was followed by the shaping of a "strategic partnership" between the IPU and the United Nations, as evidenced by the establishment of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, the introduction of a stand-alone agenda item of the UN General Assembly on *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU*, and the ensuing resolutions of both the IPU and the United Nations (see separate background note on the parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, under agenda item 4 of the Preparatory Committee).

8. The Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held in early September 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York. After several years of work by the IPU and its Member Parliaments to help shape the 2030 Development Agenda and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it provided a strong message of support and commitment to the implementation of the SDGs. The outcome Declaration—Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want—reaffirmed the principles of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, and established the critical connections between democratic governance, peace and sustainable development. The Speakers underscored the fact that, as the world organization of parliaments, the IPU was the international body best suited to help build the relationship between parliaments and the United Nations, and recommended that its capacity be strengthened to help it cope with the substantial responsibilities that came with the post-2015 development agenda.

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Speakers' Conferences are organized in close cooperation with the United Nations, and are designed to reinforce the parliamentary dimension of global governance. The Conference generally consists of a plenary debate, panel discussions, roundtables and the presentation of substantive reports. It is preceded by a Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament and concludes with the adoption of a solemn declaration drafted by a representative group of Speakers in consultation with their peers.