

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY  
UNION**

**WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

**(conference theme: "Parliamentary leadership for more effective  
multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development  
for the people and planet")**

**19 August 2020, 8:00am**

It is a pleasure to join this important meeting of speakers of parliament.

From my own years as a parliamentarian and prime minister, I know the crucial role you play.

You are the embodiment of the opening words of the United Nations Charter: “We, the peoples.”

Sitting now in a different chair, I also know that the United Nations benefits greatly from your work. You are critical partners in bringing the global to the local and the real concerns of people into the international arena.

Today your responsibilities are especially urgent and demanding.

I want to use our time together today to mention a few key concerns and how you can help mobilize action and solutions.

First, of course, is the COVID-19 pandemic.

We face an unprecedented disaster, from economic wreckage to an education deficit imperiling an entire generation, from the aggravation of humanitarian crises to the deepening of already troubling infringements of human rights.

We have surpassed 21 million cases and 770,000 deaths – and the toll continues to grow and even accelerate in some places.

The United Nations family is working across many fronts to save lives, control transmission of the virus, ease the fallout and recover better.

We have shipped personal protective equipment and other medical supplies to more than 130 countries.

We continue to press for a global ceasefire and to fight the plague of misinformation.

Across the weeks, we have issued analysis and policy recommendations spanning the full range of affected countries, sectors, issues and populations.

From the beginning, the United Nations has been calling for massive global support for the most vulnerable people and countries -- a rescue package amounting to at least 10 per cent of the global economy.

We are also supporting work to accelerate research and development for a people’s vaccine, affordable and accessible to all.

As we address the emergency today, we must learn its many lessons for tomorrow.

Even before the virus, our societies were on shaky footing, with rising inequalities, worsening degradation of the environment, shrinking civic space, inadequate public health and untenable social frictions rooted in governance failures and a lack of opportunities.

The pandemic has spotlighted these injustices in especially stark terms. It has also exposed the world’s fragilities in general.

And so we cannot go back to what was, but rather must turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future.

Nowhere will that be more important than in responding to the climate crisis.

As bad as COVID-19 is, climate disruption has the potential to cause even greater damage and upheaval.

Despite some progress in raising awareness and forging coalitions, we continue to face two overarching realities:

First, climate-related destruction continues to intensify.

Second, climate ambition is still falling short of what science tells is necessary and what the Paris Agreement is meant to achieve.

Political leaders are rightly focused on responding to the pandemic.

But while COVID-19 has forced the postponement of COP26 until 2021, a climate emergency is already upon us.

We must achieve net-zero emissions before 2050, and 45 per cent cuts by 2030.

As we strive to overcome one crisis, we have an opening to address another – and steer our world onto a more sustainable path.

We have the policies, the technology and know-how.

In that spirit, I am asking all countries to consider six climate positive actions as they rescue, rebuild and reset their economies.

First, we need to make our societies more resilient and ensure a just transition.

Second, we need green jobs and sustainable growth.

Third, bailouts of industry, aviation and shipping should be conditional on aligning with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Fourth, we need to stop wasting money on fossil fuel subsidies and the funding of coal. Coal should have no place in any rational recovery plan.

Fifth, we need to consider climate risk in all decision-making. This is more important than ever in the coming months as companies, investors and countries make far-reaching financial decisions about the future.

Sixth, we need to work together.

Quite simply, how the world recovers from COVID-19 is a “make-or-break moment” for the health of our planet.

The recovery must also get at the other sources of instability and drivers of discontent – including severe and systemic inequalities both within and between countries and communities.

From racism and gender discrimination to income disparities, these deeply entrenched violations of human rights threaten our wellbeing and our future.

Moreover, inequality damages not just its immediate targets but everyone, including its very perpetrators.

It is a brake on human development.

It is associated with economic instability, corruption, financial crises, increased crime and poor physical and mental health.

And today new dimensions of inequality are taking shape. For example, the digital divide threatens to exacerbate long-standing inequalities.

That is why I have been calling for a New Social Contract at the national level. This should feature a new generation of social protection policies and safety nets, including Universal Health Coverage and the possibility of a Universal Basic Income. Education and digital technology can be two great enablers and equalizers, by providing new skills and lifelong opportunities.

And at the international level, we need a New Global Deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly and equitably. We need a fair globalization and a stronger voice for developing countries.

Parliamentarians have a central role to play in helping the world respond to the pandemic wake-up call.

We need you to align your legislation and spending decisions with climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

As I said earlier this year in my Call to Action for Human Rights, we need you to protect civic space, which is under assault in many places. We need legislatures to push back against efforts to use the pandemic to repress people and restrict human rights. Human rights -- including freedom of expression and assembly -- are essential at any time but especially important to ensure the free flow of information on the pandemic.

We look to parliaments to advance gender equality -- in general and within your own ranks. Most parliaments remain overwhelmingly male. This must change -- including through the use of special temporary measures.

And we need you to show that multilateralism delivers real, added value.

Covid 19 has highlighted both the life-saving importance of multilateralism and its many deficits in its current form.

How fast we emerge from this crisis will depend not only on the solidarity we show within our communities and our countries, but also on the degree to which governments, scientists, businesses and of course parliaments can cooperate together across borders and continents.

This is the meaning of multilateralism. It is not an ideology; it is simply a methodology, the best one we have, to deal with truly global challenges.

Today's challenges demand a networked multilateralism, in which the United Nations and its agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, regional organizations, trade organizations and others work together more closely.

We also need an inclusive multilateralism. Governments and executive branches today are far from the only players. Civil society, the business community, local authorities, cities and regional governments are assuming more and more leadership roles in today's world.

This, in turn, can help lead to an effective multilateralism with power and mechanisms to make global governance work where it is needed.

I am hopeful.

In the space of just months, billions of people have had to change how they work, consume, move around and interact. Trillions of dollars have been mobilized to save lives and livelihoods. Ideas that were deemed impossible or impractical are suddenly on the table or in the pipeline.

This shows what can be done in the face of an emergency and with a spirit of common cause.

I attach the highest importance to our partnership.

This year, as we mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, we have been working closely with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and national parliaments to talk about our future -- and I am very grateful for your efforts to bring the debate into your parliamentary halls and your constituencies.

I look forward to continuing this global conversation with you in the crucial period ahead, and to realizing our aspirations for the future we want and the United Nations we need.

Thank you.