



Distinguished colleagues,

At this unusual time in history, I am pleased to have this opportunity to share my thoughts about the theme for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament: *Parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet.*

Since its inaugural meeting in 2000, the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament has provided a forum for presiding officers of parliaments to exchange ideas about global priorities. The discussions at these conferences have reinforced that, in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world, we require all stakeholders – including legislators – to contribute to the attainment of common objectives.

As in previous years, the Fifth World Conference makes an integral contribution to multilateralism and international cooperation. Its theme at once underscores the purpose of our exchanges, the role of parliamentarians in global affairs, and the type of world that we aspire to build together.

The topics we will consider this year reflect many global priorities, and their importance – from the parliamentary and other perspectives – has intensified because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, many of them have become more pressing as the novel coronavirus has caused great loss of life and ongoing health conditions for many, disrupted economies in most countries, and affected the education of more than a billion students globally.

At the end of 2019, we could not have accurately predicted the concerns that have taken our attention for the last six months. In addition to a focus on the broad range of immediate health issues relating specifically to COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic, a number of countries worldwide also find that they must address such issues as the need to: protect the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women and children experiencing domestic violence because of lockdown measures; challenge misinformation that targets individuals belonging to LGBTQ2, racialized and such other communities as Indigenous peoples; and protect migrant workers from dangerous conditions.

Concerning our agenda for the Fifth World Conference – parliamentary actions designed to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality, to enhance youth participation in politics and legislatures, to support progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to mitigate climate change, and to bring citizens closer to our parliaments, among others – I know that we will be undertaking our discussions at a momentous point in global history. It is also a time when the need for parliamentary leadership and action is clear.

As presiding officers of legislative bodies from around the world, we each bring our own experiences, traditions and perspectives to our discussions of these and other important issues. This diversity enriches our conversations, regardless of whether we gather in person or remotely.

We have before us an opportunity to strengthen our resilience and face common challenges together. Undeniably, the world has changed dramatically since the beginning of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic may have added a new dimension to the topics on our agenda. But our aspirations for the world remain unchanged. Strengthening parliamentary leadership and sharing our knowledge and resources to build a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable world for today and future generations, are perhaps more important now than at any other time in recent history.

I look forward to participating in the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, and to underscoring the links between democratic representation, governance, peace and sustainable development.