



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.



REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA  
Parliament

# Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

Virtual meeting, 19 and 20 August 2020  
In-person conference, 2021 in Vienna

## Declaration

***on parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet***

**Declaration adopted by consensus\* by the Speakers of parliament and the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

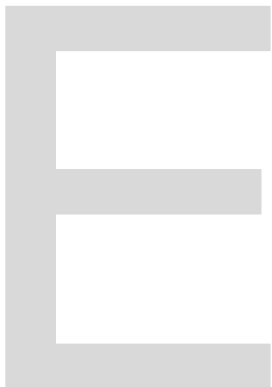
(1) We, the Speakers of parliament, stand with our fellow parliamentarians and citizens at a defining moment in global history. The COVID-19 pandemic is a health emergency of unprecedented global proportions, affecting all manner of peoples, societies and economies. The pandemic knows no borders: it is an unprecedented crisis, whose impact is felt at all levels. The pandemic has evolved into one of the greatest challenges we face as a community of nations since the Great Depression and the Second World War. Countries everywhere have taken extraordinary measures, including states of emergency, border closures and lockdowns, in an attempt to curb the deadly spread of the virus. What started as a health emergency has rapidly grown into an economic crisis with unfathomable numbers of people losing their jobs and the global economy shrinking to record levels. All countries face huge challenges in securing the health and well-being of their citizens. That said, the burden on developing countries is overwhelming.

(2) This global health crisis underscores the interdependent nature of our world today and the need for more effective multilateralism not only to lead the world out of crisis, but also to transform it for the better. International cooperation and multilateral action are needed now more than ever. We underscore that global challenges require global solutions. From that perspective alone, and especially as we work to overcome the current crisis, strengthening multilateralism and international solidarity is more important than ever before.

(3) We take this opportunity to reaffirm, in the strongest of terms, our belief in and support of the purposes and principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations. We are convinced that the United Nations is needed today more than ever and must remain the cornerstone of strong and effective global action. Parliaments should lead by example in defending multilateralism and a rules-based international order, firmly standing up for the international system built around the United Nations. We urge the international community to use wisely the unique opportunity that is offered by the 75th anniversary of the United Nations to reflect on how best to reform and strengthen the entire UN system.

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\* A limited number of delegations expressed reservations on the Declaration (see page 5 for more details).



(4) We are at a crossroads. The COVID-19 crisis will stand as a watershed in human development. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reflect on how we want to live as societies and to take corrective action to forge a global community with a shared future for humankind; to build a world respectful of our environment that aims to increase investment in health and education as foundations of peaceful, prosperous and resilient societies; and to secure respect for the rights of all. As the world grapples with the Herculean task of recovering from the crisis, we urge all to work together to build more resilient, more inclusive, more sustainable and more caring societies.

(5) The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a common blueprint for achieving global development through international cooperation. We must strive to deepen the partnerships and strengthen the architecture that bring that blueprint to fruition. We recognize that north–south cooperation is an important means to realize that ambition, and that south–south cooperation is a complement, not a substitute, to north-south cooperation. Furthermore, we will continue to enhance south–south and triangular cooperation. We reaffirm the 2030 Agenda commitments. The current crisis has exposed the fragility of our societies and demonstrated, if ever it was needed, the urgency of eradicating poverty. With 2020 marking the start of the SDG Decade of Action, we therefore call on countries everywhere to take bold and transformative steps to turn this Agenda into reality. We pledge to redouble our efforts to help implement it fully and effectively through action in our respective parliaments.

(6) In response to the pandemic, we must make sure that medical expertise and critical supplies are deployed where they are needed the most, and that strong steps are taken in such key areas as prevention, detection, testing, treatment and tracing. Efforts need to be redoubled to share information, exchange experience and best practice, and pursue international cooperation on testing methods, clinical treatment, vaccines, and medical research and development. We call for greater support for developing countries, which have weaker public health systems and face more challenges in taking the recommended medical and financial measures to respond to the COVID-19 crisis: helping them build capacity must be a priority. We acknowledge and support the leading role of the World Health Organization at the vanguard of the fight against the coronavirus and more generally of global governance in health security and health emergency preparedness. In the same vein, we welcome the resolution on the COVID-19 response adopted by the 73rd World Health Assembly.

(7) As we address the economic consequences of the pandemic, the immediate priority is to prevent the world economy from falling further into recession. We need to enhance international macroeconomic policy coordination and maintain global financial markets, while protecting jobs and salaries, and making sure that all sectors of the economy can function. In the medium and longer term, the economy must be made to work for all to overcome growing inequality, combat climate change and achieve inclusive economic growth and social justice. We must work towards a green recovery and rethink our national and global economic models to operate within finite planetary boundaries and achieve human well-being understood as more than just material consumption. All parts of the economy need to be considered from these perspectives, including the extractive industries, fisheries and agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. We acknowledge that, while women and youth are most vulnerable to economic downturns, they also hold the key to future economic renewal. We commit to promoting specific measures to ensure their economic empowerment and full inclusion in our economies. At the international level, efforts should be made to enhance the voice of emerging economies and developing countries in global decision-making, and to find sustainable solutions for heavily indebted countries. We support win–win cooperation and shared development through global and regional economic initiatives. We commit to a multilateral trading system that must be strengthened and centred on the World Trade Organization. In this context, we also acknowledge the importance of promoting a fair, equitable and non-discriminatory environment for foreign business.

(8) We underscore that it is not only urgent but also possible to tackle climate change in a meaningful way. The COVID-19 pandemic restriction measures imposed by most countries have a silver lining: that the use of less fossil-based energy brings a significant reduction in global carbon emissions. The path towards carbon reduction must form an important part of our future strategy in order to build more resilient societies, by transitioning towards a climate-neutral economy, protecting biodiversity and transforming the agro-food industry. This has the potential to rapidly

deliver jobs and growth and improve the way of life of all citizens everywhere. Enabling adequate access to safe drinking water should also be our goal. We therefore reaffirm the cardinal importance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and urge all leaders to unflinchingly move ahead with implementation, including through appropriate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

(9) Today, peace is crucial to secure international cooperation and humanitarian assistance and to minimize the economic devastation of the pandemic around the world. The pandemic must not relegate peace and international security to secondary concerns. We therefore urge all warring parties to cease hostilities, comply fully with international law, humanitarian law and the principles of peaceful coexistence, and open a precious window for diplomacy under the leadership of the United Nations. We demand that the UN Secretary-General's call in March for a global ceasefire be heeded, in order to focus on "the true fight of our lives", which was unanimously endorsed by Security Council resolution 2532, issued on 1 July, calling for "a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all cases on its agenda". We support the UN Secretary-General's call for the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. We commit to continuing our efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. When peace and social fabrics break down and give rise to radicalization and violent extremism, the needs of victims must be a priority. We urge the UN Security Council to support action taken in countries facing these two scourges to eradicate them.

(10) Humanitarian efforts must remain non-politicized, people-centred, responsive to the specific needs of women and girls, as well as age and disability responsive, and based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. This includes recognizing and implementing the Global Compacts on migration and refugees. We need to strengthen our collective response to forced displacement, keeping up the momentum generated by the first Global Refugee Forum. As the numbers of internally displaced people continue to increase, we need to find more effective ways to address internal displacement. In addition, our collective effort is needed to put an end to statelessness and to protect vulnerable groups in conflict situations, especially now, during the pandemic.

(11) The coronavirus is not gender-blind and requires a gender-sensitive response. Women and girls are turning out to be disproportionately adversely affected by quarantines, isolation measures and the economic crisis. They are significantly more vulnerable to domestic physical and verbal abuse, struggle to access emergency medical attention, face a substantially increased burden of child and elderly care, and are more likely to lose employment and income than men. We call for gender-based protection policies to be put in place for women and girls urgently.

(12) We recall that the struggle for gender equality has taken many decades. We emphasize that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. While we are still far from achieving gender equality, we are concerned that we may now be facing setbacks. We urge all countries to be vigilant, and call upon the international community to avail itself of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference to stand up for and protect gender equality in all its forms and manifestations. For our part, as Speakers of parliament and President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), we will work towards achieving full, effective and equal participation of women in parliaments and all State institutions, including in positions of leadership, and do our best to ensure that parliaments fully embody gender equality in their structures, operations and working methods and that all barriers to women's participation in politics are removed.

(13) More than ever before, we are conscious of the crucial role that young people should assume in our parliaments and all State institutions. We need urgently to harness their positive energy and innovativeness and, in the process, rejuvenate our institutions. We commit to speeding up action to curb the chronic underrepresentation of young people in parliament and parliamentary processes as well as all other State institutions. We renew our pledge to do our utmost to make politics genuinely open to young women and men and to facilitate their election to parliaments in greater number.

(14) We are committed to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms also during the fight against the pandemic. While it may be necessary to put restrictions in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus, it is imperative that such measures be legal, proportional, temporary and subject to judicial and parliamentary oversight. We underscore that they must not be used as a

pretext to undermine and restrict the enjoyment of human rights by everyone. Our response to the pandemic must be constitutionally grounded in each country in order to guarantee respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We recall that democracy is founded on the primacy of the law and the exercise of human rights. In a democratic State, no one is above the law and all are equal before the law.

(15) We recognize that democracies everywhere face serious challenges and pledge to do our utmost to uphold the intrinsic values of democracy underpinned by a well-functioning parliament. In this context, we reaffirm the principles of the Universal Declaration on Democracy. Our parliaments are sovereign, independent national institutions, each of which reflects their country's history, cultural heritage, values and customs. Each one is different, yet they all share the ambition to ensure that the will of the people forms the basis of government and democratic governance. They all have a mandate to hold government to account on behalf of the people. We are therefore also committed to continue working to achieve the SDG targets on effective, transparent and accountable institutions, and on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making.

(16) We affirm the crucial importance that all parliaments be able to fulfil their constitutional role so that people are included and have a voice in decision-making, thus guaranteeing their well-being and strengthening democracy. Moreover, we recognize that public trust in the institutions of governance needs to be earned through tireless work and engagement, and that our parliaments must lead by example. We call on all parliaments to critically examine their functioning and response during the pandemic and to build on lessons learnt to serve the people better. This includes making better use of information technology and finding new and effective ways of engaging with citizens and further fostering their active participation in democratic governance. In this regard, we also encourage sharing of best practices among parliaments in the use of innovative measures. We are committed to educating citizens on how they can use their voice and ensuring their full participation in public decision-making. We should, therefore, strengthen educational activities aimed at bringing parliaments closer to their populations, especially to young people, who are calling for greater participation in political life.

(17) Our world is characterized by rapid technological change. New technologies have the potential to widen the existing digital divide as well as creating many opportunities. This raises major ethical and rights issues, such as unregulated technological progress, including the advancement of artificial intelligence without appropriate safeguards, which affects the privacy of citizens and may exacerbate existing inequalities. It is vital to ensure that technological changes serve humanity and are not used as a weapon to undermine human dignity. We are convinced of the need to harness technological innovation and development for the good of all. Our parliaments must build bridges with the scientific community and make it a priority to keep abreast of developments for the good of humanity.

(18) We underscore that respect for international law is the bedrock of a world order based on solidarity and cooperation. Violations of international law must not be tolerated. Relations between States must be guided by the principles of peaceful coexistence: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of States, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit. States must comply with their obligations under international agreements in all areas, including disarmament and non-proliferation; combating terrorism, violent extremism and people trafficking; protection for migrants, refugees and the internally displaced; climate; trade; and human rights. As parliamentarians, we must take concerted action to avoid the escalation of conflicts, help build bridges of dialogue and cooperation, and ensure that the State operates and acts in full compliance with international law.

(19) Previous World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament have asserted that the multilateral system can no longer dispense with the participation of parliaments and have spelt out the ambition to bring a more democratic dimension to international decision-making and cooperation through parliamentary participation. Decisions taken in a multilateral framework in which the voice of our parliaments is heard are more democratic, inclusive and sustainable. Moreover, parliaments have an essential role in translating international commitments into national realities through legislation, budgetary allocations and oversight. To be effective, multilateralism must be underpinned by enforceable agreements and equipped with strong national and international accountability mechanisms. Accountability goes to the very heart of what all parliaments do and is part of our

constitutional mandate. We firmly believe, therefore, that our parliaments can help provide accountability as a natural extension of our interaction with the United Nations. Our engagement in the international arena and within the UN system will advance and strengthen the legitimacy of the United Nations as a global body in which “We the Peoples” are indeed the peoples of the United Nations as proclaimed in its Charter. Last but certainly not least, parliamentary diplomacy can be instrumental in efforts to foster trust, understanding and cooperation among nations.

(20) We are convinced that, as the world organization of parliaments, the IPU is the international body best suited to help us build and consolidate a meaningful relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. It is our world organization of parliaments, and we call on all our parliaments to help strengthen the IPU and further enhance its strategic partnership with the United Nations. We underscore that the IPU is a parliamentary political organization which must be endowed with stronger parliamentary leadership, direction and control.

(21) We are resolute in our commitment to work for the good of the people and the planet – to represent our peoples effectively in order to advance their hopes and aspirations and deliver progress and solutions. We also commit to upholding and revitalizing multilateralism, with a strong parliamentary dimension. As the world struggles with a pandemic of epic proportions that can be addressed only if all countries work together and in solidarity, parliaments, through their law-making and oversight functions, have a pivotal role to play.

(22) We undertake to convey this Declaration to our parliaments and to report on action taken to follow through on our commitments. We will do our part to exemplify parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and the planet. We ask the President of the IPU to present this Declaration to the United Nations in the context of the UN75 Summit.

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**Czech Republic and Hungary:** Reservation on paragraph 10 (Global Compacts on migration and refugees).

**Lithuania and Sweden:** Reservation on paragraphs 4 (concept of “rights of all”), 7 (concept of “win-win cooperation”) and 18 (principles of peaceful coexistence).

**Armenia:** Reservation on paragraph 18 (principles of peaceful coexistence).

**Australia, Canada and New Zealand:** Reservation on the wording of the Declaration as a whole, in light of the impartial role of Speakers in their respective political systems.

**Germany:** Reservation on the Declaration as a whole.