



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA  
Parliament

## **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**

**Opening address by the  
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

***Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron***

**19 August 2020**

Excellencies, Speakers of parliament, esteemed guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to join the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of the Austrian National Council in officially opening the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

We, the parliamentary community, together with our partners, the United Nations, and global leaders and notable activists, have been gathering at this unique forum every five years since the 2000 Millennium Summit to reinforce a parliamentary dimension to global governance.

Our Fifth World Speakers' Conference, however, is like no other. We convene as crisis and opportunity, despair and hope, converge into an unknown that is affecting every single inch of our lives. But this is not only a test of our endurance to withstand the current perils. It is also an opportunity to make the best of our wisdom; to chart a path towards a future that is just and fair, sustainable and prosperous, inclusive and compassionate. We can, and we must, build back better.

I say this because action is urgent.

The current state of affairs is not encouraging. The crisis is unfolding at an unprecedented pace, impacting people's lives and livelihoods. We are facing a series of multiple crises – health, economic and social, where violence and humanitarian disasters are disturbingly becoming the norm. And I daresay a crisis in the protection of democracy and human rights: some governments are using fear as an excuse to permanently institutionalize undemocratic practices, and making a new normal out of states of emergency. All this on top of the ongoing climate crisis.

Although countries have taken bold remedial action to protect their economies, this comes with painful and uncertain implications for the future economic situation. The International Monetary Fund's June projections of global growth stand at only 4.9 per cent in 2020 and 5.4 per cent for 2021. This becomes even more distressing when we consider that, according to OXFAM, half a billion people could be thrown into poverty.

Facts are essential but let us not forget that behind them are people who are suffering. Colleagues: remember that we represent those who wake up without knowing whether they will get to eat that day; we represent those who are forced to leave behind everything that they know as they are displaced and become refugees; we represent those who stand up to divisive walls and risk everything as migrants; finally, children may not vote, but under no circumstance should we allow them to be left behind – they need education, health and freedom from violence.

As we build back better, we must have people at the heart of our decisions. Depending on our choices, people may live through more of the same, or they could see their lives drastically improved. We should not remain distant to their voices, to their demands, to their needs; we must be close to them every step of the way. And this is why our parliaments have to be effective in translating global agreements into national realities.

Although the current pandemic has been a test of parliamentary resilience, there is no doubt that parliaments, as the guardians of human rights and the rule of law, should remain the bastion of societies that are prosperous, stable and inclusive.

A democratic and deliberative spirit inspired our founders to establish this Organization 131 years ago.

In a world where nations resorted to conflict, they dared to imagine a world in which peaceful solutions were possible.

This is precisely what parliamentary diplomacy is about – dialogue to find common ground and understanding. Yes, we may not always count on full and total agreement on every single issue, but that is all the more reason to believe in debate and to build towards consensus. It is an exercise in tolerance on the basis of empathy, and the means to understand others to create joint solutions. Now, more than ever, we should be vigorous advocates for multilateralism.

Just a few days ago, we commemorated 75 years since the devastating nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We are reminded of our shared commitment to build a world free from nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in general, free from terrorism and violent extremism, a world where our peoples can lead safe and dignified lives. This is our duty as elected representatives: to ensure that our governments live up to their obligation for a nuclear-weapons-free world.

As we mark in 2020 the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, our efforts have been directed towards mobilizing parliaments to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

However, this anniversary is not just a matter of commemoration. This Declaration was adopted for a reason: women have been left out for far too long throughout history. This is about correcting the course. It is about transforming – not celebrating – a reality that has lacked any sort of justice for entire centuries.

This is about closing the wage gap; this is about ending child marriage; about ending gender-based violence; about not allowing any more girls to have to live through genital mutilation. Complete equality between men and women – that should not be an ideal, that should already be a fact.

I went into politics when I was just 15 years old and was elected to parliament at the age of 21. Mexico, my country, opened the door to young people many decades ago. Sadly, many young people all over the world will not have this same opportunity. Only 2.2% of the world's MPs are under 30 years old. Is this fair? Is it acceptable to shut the door on those who make up over half of the planet's population?

It is up to us to build more inclusive and representative democracies – no one, absolutely no one, should be left behind.

More will certainly have to be done as new challenges loom on the horizon, testing the resilience of parliaments, their role in governance and their mission of serving the people. The same reasoning applies to the IPU. As the youngest ever President of the organisation and only its second woman president in its 131 year long history I can only express my most fervent hope that this Organization will continue to evolve into a strong parliamentary political organisation at the service of all parliaments everywhere.

Dear Speakers,

Let us seize the momentum created by the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, by our aspirational Declaration, by the invaluable support of our partners and special guests, to offer what the world needs most – parliamentary leadership for a brighter and more prosperous future.

This virtual Speakers' Conference is about you – the Speakers of the parliaments of the world. I urge you to make this event a success and shape the global community of national parliaments as it strives to navigate a world that is calling for renewed multilateralism and for global solutions to global problems. Starting with our Declaration, we need to reform and strengthen multilateralism with the United Nations at its core.

Let me add, Mr. Secretary-General, that notwithstanding the unusual times we live in, we very much hope that we will be granted an opportunity to present our Declaration to the General Assembly as has been the case on all past occasions

My fellow colleagues,

We are over 46,000 parliamentarians all over the world. Our potential must not be underestimated: we can and we should enact deep and lasting change. Let us reflect: how will history remember our generation?

(pause...)

In my own view, we can be the generation that achieves total gender equality. We can be the generation that opens the door to politics for young people. We can be the generation that redefines human solidarity. We can be the generation that strengthens multilateralism. We can be the generation that puts an end to poverty. We can be the generation that eradicates hate speech.

We can be the generation that future generations can look back to and say: “they made a difference”.

We, fellow parliamentarians, can be the ones to change history.

Let us make the most of this unique event.

Thank you for being here.

¡Muchas gracias!

Merci beacoup!

Shukran yazilan!