

Ms. S. Ataullahjan (Canada) Vision for the IPU

Greetings from Canada. I want to take a second to acknowledge the difficulty of this current moment. This is a period of unprecedented crisis where people globally are struggling with uncertain times brought about by COVID-19. I believe that the crisis we are in confirms once again the central role that we have, as parliamentarians in our respective nations, to foster a common understanding of the need for global unity.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my vision and experience with you today.

I have a strong history of involvement through the Canadian Group of the IPU. As a rapporteur for the IPU Standing Committee of Democracy and Human Rights, I took the lead in drafting a report on the role of parliaments in assisting women and children's access to health services. The report was unanimously adopted in a landmark resolution on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) at the 126th Assembly. I was the only Parliamentarian to speak at the World Health Assembly in Geneva on this topic in May 2011. I have also held positions through the IPU as Goodwill Ambassador for Maternal and Newborn Child Health, as a member of the executive of the Bureau for Women Parliamentarians, and on the ExCom where I headed the first ever subcommittee on finance, that was initiated by my asking for a reduction in member countries' fees. My ability to lead at the IPU is well recognized. When problems arose at our last physical meeting in Belgrade, the Arab Group and the Secretariat turned to me to provide solutions.

My multicultural background and status as a Canadian immigrant female parliamentarian has led me to a better understanding of complex issues in different regions of the world. I currently serve as President of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions, where I successfully turned the platform into a place for constructive dialogue, establishing the round tables that brought all parties in the region together on the issue of water scarcity for the first time in 2016, and again in 2017 to discuss the importance of science as neutral umbrella for coexistence and peace. My experience in this region, mediating with Israel and Palestine, as well as Yemen will help me continue working for peace in the Middle East.

I believe strongly in the values and ideals of the IPU. My priorities as President of the IPU would center on four areas:

- human rights and gender inequity
- climate action
- access to education
- parliamentary diplomacy

As the incoming Chair of the Senate Human Rights Committee I have worked to uphold the principles of human rights within Canada by leading studies on cyberbullying, women in Afghanistan, garment workers in developing countries, and Syrian refugees. I have also tabled bills on organ trafficking, and cluster munitions.

Now, more than ever, we are all connected to each other. As parliamentarians, we must take the lead in fostering respect and tolerance for all religions and ethnicities globally and within our countries. We must work to protect human rights globally, especially amongst vulnerable groups. Hate does not happen in a vacuum. It is the result of unchecked biases, acts of bias, and discrimination. It is the responsibility of all global citizens, to stop hate around them.

We must also consider how as parliamentarians we can work to improve gender equity by not only considering discrimination but addressing the root causes through focused policies and programs. Sexism and harassment also exist in parliaments. We need to set our own houses in order.

Secondly, one of my priorities would be climate action. One of the most pressing dilemmas that we are currently facing globally is increased climate shocks such as flooding and drought. We are already seeing food insecurity, and famines related to natural disasters. Decreasing access to fresh water is also a growing concern with many countries already struggling with water shortages.

There is also the worry that climate change will lead to social instability and potentially conflict and displacement. As government officials and policy makers grapple with the implications of climate change, we must implement mitigation strategies in a timely manner. I believe combined efforts to address these concerns is crucial. There is an important opportunity for parliamentarians to share learnings on how their governments are working to mainstream climate action into their policies.

Next, my vision includes a focus on access to education:

Ensuring access to education for children and adolescents, especially those who are disenfranchised, is essential. This requires not only providing physical access to affordable schools, but also addressing the factors such as poverty that force so many children to drop out of school.

Covid-19 has only made this situation more dire, as it has led to many children being temporarily removed from school. Save the Children estimates that as many as 10 million children may **never** return to school. The high numbers of children at home has also increased the number of children at risk of violence. Access to education has never been more in crisis.

The final area I would focus on is **Parliamentary Diplomacy:**

When we consider the multiple areas of tension in our world today, it becomes clear that there has never been a greater need for the IPU. I believe strongly that what the IPU does best is encourage dialogue between countries. We must also continue to vigorously defend the rights of parliamentarians around the world. When parliamentarians face harassment, or the threat of physical harm, they are unable to speak effectively for the people they represent. The IPU has been a champion for the rights of parliamentarians and I would work to continue that fight.

It is time for the IPU to reunite and focus on its core goals. Members must put aside their differences and put their citizens first. A successful strategy depends upon a measurable impact.

Globally we were all blindsided by COVID, and no nation has the answer for the best course of action. One of the key takeaways that this challenge illustrates is the degree to which we are all bound together as human beings on this planet.

To see the ways in which countries have met this crisis with successful innovations, we need only look to places like Thailand, that celebrated 100 days COVID free, or Rwanda, that used human sized robots to take temperatures and deliver supplies, or Ghana that used drones to deliver tests.

The IPU needs to create a space where countries can work together and learn from one another to solve the crises of today and tomorrow. That was, after all, a core objective of the small group of parliamentarians who founded our organization nearly a century and a half ago.

Our vision is a world where every voice counts, where parliaments are at the service of the people for peace and development.

I believe this is an objective which we must urgently recommit ourselves to today.

With that in mind, I would like to thank you again and hope for the honour of your support for President of the IPU.