



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.



REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA  
Parliament

# Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

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

## REPORT

### FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT

VIRTUAL MEETING, 19-20 AUGUST 2020

Preceded by the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit of Women  
Speakers (17-18 August 2020)

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## **Foreword by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron**

The Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was like no other – a unique event in unique times. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global parliamentary community convened virtually in August 2020 as crisis and opportunity, despair and hope, converged into an unknown affecting every inch of our lives.

With the crisis unfolding at an unprecedented pace, impacting people's lives and livelihoods, we face multiple crises – health, economic and social. 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 are making a new normal out of states of emergency. Not to mention the ongoing climate crisis. But this is also an opportunity to build back better.

We are over 46,000 parliamentarians around the world. Our potential must not be underestimated: we can and we should enact deep and lasting change. How will history remember our generation? 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 look back to and say: "They made a difference".

That is why the agenda of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament – organized by the IPU in close cooperation with the United Nations and the Austrian Parliament – tackled the important topics and challenges facing the world today, including youth empowerment, gender equality, the future of democracy, sustainable development, climate change, building inclusive economies, science and technology, counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism. Two days of enriching discussions showcased the diversity, vibrancy, leadership and expertise of the global parliamentary community. The conference also underscored the need for strong and effective multilateralism, with a robust parliamentary component, which delivers for people and planet.

Our community must now seize the momentum created by the virtual segment of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, by the aspirational outcome Declaration we adopted, 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.

## **Foreword by the President of the National Council of Austria, Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka**

Needless to say, 2020 is and will remain a unique year in terms of global challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is a state of emergency not only for our health systems, but also for our economies and the social security of our citizens. This exceptional situation also represents a test of parliamentary democracy and the values upon which it is founded. As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role to play in meeting these challenges.

An alarming development of the pandemic is the increased spread of hate speech, especially online. I am especially alarmed by the rise of anti-Semitism. Hate speech and anti-Semitism are expressions of an anti-democratic attitude and are directed against our societies and values. We as parliamentarians must do everything we can to combat all forms of hatred, not least through preventive measures and education.

In times of an ongoing worldwide pandemic, the virtual part of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament has given us the opportunity to show that parliamentarism is relevant and that multilateral cooperation, under the umbrella of the IPU, works also and especially in times of crisis. Nevertheless, virtual events cannot replace in-person meetings, direct dialogue or diplomatic exchange. That is why I particularly look forward to hosting the in-person part of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and to welcoming my colleagues to Vienna in 2021.

## Foreword by the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Martin Chungong

The fifth edition of the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament has been like no other. For the first time in its twenty-year history, it was decided to organize the conference in two stages: a virtual part as a result of the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an in-person part scheduled to take place in 2021. Also for the first time, the conference was organized with a national parliament – the Austrian National Council represented by Speaker Wolfgang Sobotka – as well as our usual partner, the United Nations.

Over 115 of the world's most senior legislators took part in the conference. They were joined by hundreds of other members of parliament, diplomats, scientists and representatives of multilateral organizations to discuss international parliamentary cooperation to address the challenges facing a COVID-19 world. Spanning multiple time zones, countries and languages, the virtual conference showed that the need and desire for parliamentarians to meet, interact with the experts, exchange ideas and find common solutions is stronger now than ever.

The IPU, as the global organization of national parliaments, remains the premier forum for parliamentarians to meet. Its convening power is as important – if not more so – today, in a socially distanced world, as it was over 130 years when the first parliamentarians across different borders met in Paris, France.

The overall theme of parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet was an opportunity for the most senior level of parliamentary representation to examine and pledge action to address the crises facing the world today, including access to health, growing social and economic inequalities and the climate emergency.

Just before the Speakers' Conference, the IPU also brought together the world's top women parliamentarians in the virtual 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament on 17 and 18 August. Efforts on gender equality are needed in parliaments, as currently just 25 per cent of the world's MPs are women and women account for only 20 per cent of the speakership of parliaments worldwide. The summit focused specifically on climate change, women's economic empowerment, and preventing violence against women and girls. The participants committed to action to achieve gender equality in all walks of life, building on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

This publication offers insights into the main outcomes of our virtual Speakers' conferences this year. Pandemic permitting, we look forward to meeting physically in Vienna in 2021, for part two of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, which will also be an opportunity to take stock of progress.

*The Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held on 19 and 20 August 2020, under the overall theme of Parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet. Over 115 of the world's top legislators took part in the Conference which was organized by the IPU in partnership with the Parliament of Austria and the United Nations. The full List of Participants is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/file/9572/download>.*

*The Conference Preparatory Committee (see Annex X on composition), established in October 2018 based on gender-balanced nominations from all the Geopolitical Groups, guided the substantive preparations: preparing the Reports on cross-cutting themes of the Conference, drafting the concept notes for the substantive panels, and submitting a preliminary draft Declaration as a basis for consultations with the full membership.*

*The Speakers' Conference was preceded by the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament which was held on 17 and 18 August. The world's top women legislators participating in the Summit focused specifically on climate change, women's economic empowerment, and preventing violence against women and girls, and they helped inform the outcomes of the Speakers' Conference.*

## General debate

In light of the virtual format of the conference, the general debate on parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers sustainable development for the people and planet was replaced by Speakers' written statements published on the IPU website (<https://www.ipu.org/event/fifth-world-conference-speakers-parliament#event-sub-page-22287/>) and pre-recorded videos about parliaments and the pandemic posted on the IPU YouTube channel ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLwJpE\\_EfvM6EnuP1Fiab8nZ7TdmD39rG](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLwJpE_EfvM6EnuP1Fiab8nZ7TdmD39rG)).

## Inaugural ceremony

Opening statements were delivered by the President of the National Council of Austria, Wolfgang Sobotka, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron (see the full text of their speeches in annex).

IPU President Gabriela Cuevas said: "We convene as crisis and opportunity, despair and hope, converge into an unknown that is affecting every single inch of our lives. 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."

President of the National Council of Austria, Wolfgang Sobotka, said: "As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role in meeting the current challenges. It is therefore crucial that we also see the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to acknowledge the great value and strength of a functioning parliamentary democracy."

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: "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."

## Conference reports

Speakers of parliament presented and examined background reports on five crosscutting themes to inform their discussions. Those themes were: sustainable development; youth participation in politics; gender equality; parliamentary democracy; and science and technology (see full reports in annex).

### ***Decade of action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***

The *Decade of action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* conference report provides an overview of parliamentary action to implement the SDGs. It lists lessons learned from the IPU's efforts to mobilize parliaments on SDG implementation and urges for even greater action in the "Decade of action" – the ten years left to implement the goals. Special emphasis is placed on the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of developmental areas. Nevertheless, the report urges parliaments to use the current crisis as an opportunity to do things differently and invest more forcefully in sustainable development. Parliamentary cooperation is seen as an important vehicle for action.

The report focused on the following issues:

- IPU's work on the SDGs
- Scorecard and lessons learned
- Decade of action

The report was presented by its rapporteurs, Mr. C. Leekpai, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Thailand, and Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen, President of the Storting of Norway.

### ***Stepping up youth participation in politics and parliaments: From words to action***

*Stepping up youth participation in politics and parliaments: From words to action* marks the tenth anniversary of the IPU resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. It declares that achieving meaningful democracy requires the full and active participation of young people in democratic processes at all levels.

The report highlights that at a time when our societies are trying to tackle incredible challenges – from public health issues to climate change – the political participation of youth is not only a right that must be fulfilled, but it is also the smartest investment we can make to our collective futures.

The report focuses on the following areas:

- Global trends and data on youth political participation.
- Current barriers to youth participation.
- The evolution of the IPU youth movement and IPU's actions for youth empowerment.
- Concrete proposals to better empower young people.

The report was presented by its rapporteurs: Mr. S. Chenine, President of the National People's Assembly of Algeria, Ms. F. Zainal, Speaker of the Council of Representatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Lord Fakafanua, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga.

### ***Making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality: Best practices and parliamentary commitments***

The *Making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality: Best practices and parliamentary commitments* conference report highlights achievements, persisting and new challenges, and good practices in advancing gender equality. It calls for renewed commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and Sustainable Development Goal 5. In this vein, it identifies key action areas for parliaments and their members to accelerate progress in advancing gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The report focuses on the following areas:

- The elimination of discrimination in law.
- Achieving equal participation of men and women in parliament.
- The elimination of violence against women and girls, with a special focus on violence against women in parliament.

The report was presented by its rapporteurs, Mr. K. Lusaka, Speaker of the Kenyan Senate, Ms. D. Mukabalisa, Speaker of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies, and Ms. S. Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of the Bangladeshi Jatiya Sangsad.

### ***Democracy and the changing role of parliament in the twenty-first century***

The *Democracy and the changing role of parliament in the twenty-first century* conference report identifies some of the changes in parliament's role in democracy, with a particular emphasis on how parliaments have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world moves into the third decade of the twenty-first century, it is imperative for parliaments to reassert themselves vis-à-vis the global societal changes that constitute a new international reality.

The report focused on the following issues:

- Relations between parliament and the people
- Parliament and the new technology environment
- Public engagement in the work of parliament
- Parliament and international politics

The report was presented by Mr. D. Syllouris, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, and Ms. R.A. Kadaga, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda.

### ***Science, technology, and ethics: Emerging challenges and urgent solutions***

The *Science, technology, and ethics: Emerging challenges and urgent solutions* conference report offers an outline of some of the key challenges parliamentarians will be facing with regard to science and technology, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Globalization calls for a more coordinated approach among parliaments to solutions to global problems related to the use of science and technology.

The report focused on the following issues:

- Ethics and limits of scientific research
- Science, technology and ethics in preventing conflicts and dealing with crises
- Ethical use of the internet to prevent human rights violations and social disruption
- Artificial intelligence: Boundary conditions for ethical development
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution: How to make it inclusive

The report was presented by Mr. Y. Levin, Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, and Ms. A. Santo, President of the House of Councillors of Japan.



## **Setting the stage:** *Interactive debate on health, climate and the economy*

The interactive debate featured three renowned specialists: Ms. S. Gilbert (Professor of Vaccinology, University of Oxford); Ms. P. Koundouri, Professor (Athens University of Economics and Business and President-Elect, European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists); and Mr. J. Sachs (Director of the Center for Sustainable Development and Professor, Columbia University, and Director, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network).

The interactive debate focused on what practical action parliaments could take on health, climate and the economy based on data and science. It was vital to translate international commitments into national realities through country-specific approaches. Progress depended on both a top-down approach from parliaments and a bottom-up approach from the people whom parliamentarians represented and other stakeholders.

Referring to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it was pointed out that public health measures should be implemented rapidly and maintained. Those measures included: the identification of areas of virus transmission; effective and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE); and social distancing measures and behavioural changes. The medical research community was testing drugs for efficacy in clinical trials. Even though vaccines took time to develop, the use of technologies allowed for much shorter development times. Disease-specific vaccines still needed to be produced, manufactured and tested and their efficacy determined. Assessment of efficacy sought answers to the following: did the vaccine protect; did it prevent disease and transmission, or reduce them; did it work in older people; and how long would protection last? Only once those questions were answered could it be decided on how to use the vaccine for most benefit. In their public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, parliaments were urged to focus on three pillars: strengthen and pursue public health measures; support the health-care system and workers and scientific research; and plan for the vaccine roll-out. It was also vital to hold governments to account for their public health and humanitarian responses to the pandemic.

The climate emergency meant that it was urgent to limit global warming to +1.5C, beyond which the risk of extreme weather events and poverty for hundreds of millions of people would significantly increase. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it was needed: to identify and promote technological and policy pathways for climate change mitigation and adaptation; to provide strategic recommendations and mobilize experts for the ongoing implementation of the European Green Deal; to mobilize experts to revisit policies for clean energy supply and climate adaptation projects conducted within the economy, industry, production and consumption, large-scale infrastructure, transport, food and agriculture, construction, taxation and social benefits; to mobilize stakeholders to guarantee local engagement and support for such policies. In addition, climate laws must: include measures aimed at reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 2030; address other legislative interventions to achieve climate neutrality by 2050; determine assessment mechanisms between the present and 2050; identify financial mechanisms required to achieve climate neutrality. A comprehensive framework that would recognize the relationship between water, energy, food security and biodiversity must be established.

Attempting to face each new crisis with the same thinking would not provide sustainable and resilient socio-economic solutions. A fundamental transformation of the economic, social and financial systems that would trigger exponential change in strengthening social, economic, health, and environmental resilience was needed. Scientific conclusions must be resorted to when designing economies that would mitigate threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pandemics.

Also, fundamental human rights were under siege during the current pandemic and although midterm everyone was concentrating on a vaccine – which would be a turning point – politicians were starting to think in the long term and were starting to see the environment as a basic human right.

The current crisis brought to the surface the failures of governments and lack of global solidarity. Governments must listen to science and make sure they act for the people. That did not however minimize individual responsibility. Governments must find means to fund public health and humanitarian relief, and to redress growing hunger. Debt relief would counter rising inequalities and the digital divide. Europe was a positive example of the kind of regional approach and cooperation with neighbours that was needed on the global scale. Parliaments must be aware that the pandemic would have a long lasting negative impact and thus must ensure their governments were acting on behalf of the people.

Parliaments were challenged to actively implement their powers and prepare for the post-pandemic era in a timely manner. The experts urged the legislators to hold their governments to account in their health and economic responses to the pandemic. They called for parliaments to listen to the science and, to allocate more money to strengthen public health, to support health-care workers, and to invest in greener research. Several Speakers issued a clarion call for emission reductions and efforts towards a carbon-neutral economy. They stressed that parliaments had the power and duty to translate key international commitments – like the Paris Agreement on climate and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – into national legislation and policy.

As part of building back better, the guest speakers and Speakers of parliament stressed the importance of heeding the lessons of the pandemic, and evoked key inter-connected issues such as food security, poverty reduction, gender-responsive policies, greener economies, development aid, debt relief, digitalization, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. There was a clear appetite among Speakers to pursue evidence-based policy-making and law-making, and to allocate resources based on the science and driven by regional and global solidarity.

## Panel discussion

### *Stepping up parliamentary action: The climate change emergency*

The panel featured Mr. C. Litardo Caicedo (Speaker of the National Assembly of Ecuador), Ms. R. Suñé Pascuet (Speaker of the General Council of Andorra), and Mr. H. Kabadi (Speaker of the National Assembly of Chad) as lead Speakers. The expert panellists were: Ms. Y. Kakabadse (former President of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Mr. L.A. de Alba (Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the 2019 Climate Summit).

Interventions from the (virtual) floor were made by the following: Mr. M. Nasheed (Speaker of the People's Majlis of Maldives); Mr. H. Stöckli (President of the Council of States of Switzerland); Ms. Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân (President of the National Assembly of Viet Nam); Mr. F. Etgen (President of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg); and Ms. A. Vehviläinen (Speaker of Parliament of Finland).

Countries reaffirmed their commitment to the fight against climate change, and to adhering to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, including in relation to limiting the global average temperature increase to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The key role of parliaments and parliamentarians in monitoring the implementation of the Paris Agreement was discussed particularly with regards to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The importance of parliamentarians in guaranteeing transparency in climate change action was highlighted.

It was emphasized during the discussion that climate change was not only an environmental problem, but also a social and economic problem. Biodiversity loss, food insecurity and water scarcity were strongly linked to climate change and could have severe social and economic implications, as well as serious impacts on human health. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated many of the social and economic challenges created by climate change and tested societal resilience. While progress on addressing climate change had been made in recent years, the current pandemic had shifted the world's attention and economic recovery was now being prioritized. There were fears that the fight against climate change would be sidelined as the world grappled with the economic shockwaves caused by the pandemic.

Despite the serious challenges created by COVID-19, recovery efforts offered a unique opportunity to introduce a new model of economic and social development that was profoundly linked with climate action. There was a need to better align national development agendas with climate change agendas. In particular, more effort should be made to identify and address synergies between the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, particularly the NDCs, to jointly achieve those international agreements. Climate change had uneven impacts across and within societies around the world. Climate action therefore needed to be seen not only as an environmental fight, but also as a fight against inequality and social injustice.

Parliaments around the world could use COVID-19 recovery as an opportunity to transition to more sustainable development pathways and adopt greener and more resilient economic models that reduced carbon emissions and protected the environment. Such a transition would require dramatic changes in production and consumption patterns, and the adoption of green growth principles, such as those of a circular economy which limited resource use and reduced waste. Social policies that protected vulnerable and at-risk groups must be adopted simultaneously. The shift to more sustainable economic and social models could also bring prosperity as it was expected to create millions of jobs and contribute to more inclusive economies.

Parliaments had a key role to play in the transition to more sustainable development models. MPs had budget, legislative and oversight powers that were critical to tackling the climate crisis and ensuring a sustainable recovery from COVID-19. Parliamentarians must continue to take strong action through their legislative roles to ensure climate change action was embedded in laws. Parliamentarians must

also reflect on the role they could play in facilitating access to climate finance, such as the Green Climate Fund, and allocate appropriate and sufficient budgets for climate change activities. Furthermore, MPs must not forget their roles as representatives of the people and must ensure that the needs of diverse constituents, including the most at-risk groups, were met in the context of climate change.

A number of concrete actions parliaments could take were highlighted in the discussion. Some countries had already incorporated climate change into their recovery plans by allocating State budgets specifically for climate action within their COVID-19 recovery funding. Other countries had started to assess the climate and environmental impact of every law, and had taken legislative action on sustainable production standards, responsible waste management, recycling, clean water access, and sustainable transport. There was a strong call for parliaments to take action in reducing carbon emissions, and to aim to develop “zero carbon” plans which would set greener economic trajectories. The economic benefits of reducing carbon emissions were highlighted as it would expand the market for renewable energy and create jobs. Some countries had already committed to becoming carbon neutral within the next 15 years, which was recognized as an ambitious, but important, target.

The discussion featured many calls for increased national and international collaboration in the fight against climate change. A multi-actor approach which included actors at the local, national and global levels, as well as actors from the private sector and civil society organizations, was needed for climate action to be effective. Increased collaboration between parliaments and governments was needed, as well as between parliaments themselves.

The IPU could play an important role in this process and help support countries in implementing the *Parliamentary action plan on climate change*, taking into consideration the varying development stages and needs of different countries. There were proposals to create spaces for improved parliamentary exchange, including a regional virtual platform to share legislative advances on climate change and a system to follow up on the implementation of climate change actions. The importance of multilateral and international cooperation was critical for limiting and reducing the impacts of climate change, and developed countries could provide support to developing countries in that joint fight, while also ensuring they adhered to internationally agreed commitments on climate change in the Paris Agreement.

## Panel discussion

### *Human mobility in pursuit of a better life: Challenges, opportunities and solutions*

The panel featured Ms. Laura Rojas (Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico), Mr. Mustafa Şentop, (President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly) and Ms. Zinaida Greceanii (President of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova) as lead Speakers. The expert panellists were: Ms. Gillian Triggs (Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees) and Mr. Gilles Carbonnier (Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)).

Interventions from the (virtual) floor were made by the following: Ms. Isabelle Moret (President of the National Council of Switzerland); Mr. Rached Kheriji Ghannouchi (President of the Assembly of People's Representatives of Tunisia); Mr. Habib El Malki (Speaker of the House of Representatives of Morocco); Mr. Moustapha Niasse (President of the National Assembly of Senegal); and Mr. Delfim Neves (Speaker of the National Assembly of Sao Tome and Principe).

Appropriately, the panel discussion coincided with World Humanitarian Day; parliaments urged each other and were urged by the IPU's key humanitarian partners not to view the issue of migration only from the standpoint of security and State interests, but to consider the humanitarian aspect of migration – the need to protect migrants' lives and dignity, the need for solidarity and for recognition that no one country could respond to the challenges posed by human mobility, and the need to work for peace.

Against the backdrop of growing numbers of men and women, boys and girls, on the move, the panel began by emphasizing that human mobility in pursuit of a better life had always existed and was a fact of life.

Having said that, leaving one's home was never easy. Migration remained a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. For many, crossing borders was sometimes the only available option. Many did not have the luxury of choice. The journey to a new country had furthermore become more arduous and dangerous, with many subjected to kidnapping, violence, extortion and even loss of life. The plight of women and children, often more vulnerable to exploitation and violence, was highlighted.

The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated those problems, making mobility more challenging and limited, and often pushing people in already vulnerable situations to endure more drastic conditions without any facilities or sanitation, and often without access to health care.

COVID-19 had furthermore had a discriminatory impact on women and children in particular, with a higher prevalence of gender-based violence across the globe.

These additional dimensions called for even greater cooperation both between countries (whether countries of origin, transit or destination) and within countries, so as to ensure respect for the rule of law and for the rights of men and women on the move.

In that respect, it was important that parliaments step up their action to implement the Global Compacts on migration and refugees and set up structures to oversee the work of government in those areas. The two global instruments called for enhanced coordination between countries and stakeholders. In particular, the overall aim of the Global Compact on Refugees was to ease the burden on host communities and enhance refugee self-reliance and support. No one could achieve that singlehandedly, and more cooperation was required to ensure dignity for asylum-seekers and refugees and, ultimately, conditions for a safe return home.

Addressing the root causes of forced migration was highlighted as a priority. That included investing in and supporting better living conditions in countries of origin as well as conflict prevention and resolution.

The development of legal routes for migration would furthermore bring about greater safety and respect for the rights of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. It would also enable better management of migratory flows and enhanced inclusion of migrants in host countries through proactive integration policies and measures.

The panel concluded by recalling the role and responsibilities of parliaments in ensuring respect for the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, and in particular in these times of enhanced sanitary risk and major economic crisis to come. Parliaments had a crucial role in developing a legal framework to facilitate and promote safe human mobility and respect for the rights of people on the move, whether migrants, asylum-seekers or refugees. This called for enhanced cooperation within and between parliaments. Parliaments and their members were also called upon to lead by example in building cohesive and peaceful societies where all could find their place.

## Panel discussion

### *Improving governance by bridging the gap between parliaments and the people*

The panel featured Mr. J.A. Bruijn (President of the Senate of the Netherlands) and Ms. P. Maharani (Speaker of the House of Representatives of Indonesia) as lead Speakers. The expert panellists were: Ms. P. Mlambo-Ngcuka (Executive Director of UN Women) and Mr. F. Hochschild-Drummond (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Commemoration of the United Nations 75th Anniversary).

Interventions from the (virtual) floor were made by the following: Mr. A. Norlén (Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag), Mr. A. Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada), Mr. O. Birla (Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India), Ms. I. Murniece (Speaker of the Saeima of Latvia), Mr. J. Guaidó (Speaker of the National Assembly of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Ms. T. Narbaeva (Chairwoman of the Senate of Uzbekistan), and Mr. I. Zorčič (President of the National Assembly of Slovenia).

The participants observed that maintaining public trust was constantly at the forefront of parliamentary preoccupations. People expected parliament to be able to solve their problems and make their lives better. When people felt that parliament was unable to fight for their interests, it was then that they lost trust in their institutions.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's demands towards parliament would certainly increase. Amidst the rising public concern and increasing economic hardship, parliament needed to show to the people that it continued to work for the people.

The pandemic was an enormous drama because of the people affected: the people who had died and consequently their relatives, workers who had contributed to combatting the crisis, people who had lost their income, and also companies that had gone bankrupt, and the restrictions in freedom for all of us. The crisis was unparalleled in recent history.

The measures taken to stop the spread of the virus had had an enormous impact on society, and further difficult decisions had to be made. Proposals on how best to respond to the pandemic had led to heated discussions in both parliament and society as a whole, since the response affected people's rights directly. It was of the utmost importance that parliaments scrutinize new measures proposed by the government and do justice to the concerns in society.

It was suggested, for example, that parliament must work faster to produce laws that could help people cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether in the health sector, the economy, or even in social life.

Parliaments had demonstrated their resilience by rapidly resuming their activity, including through holding meetings remotely, adapting parliamentary meeting rooms and adopting hybrid virtual-face-to-face working methods.

Every parliament needed to encourage public participation in its functioning in order to improve parliamentary oversight and governance. Information technology provided opportunities for parliaments to work differently and to remain continuously engaged with the public.

Parliaments were developing new channels for public engagement, such as an online mechanism for public participation in legislative drafting of bills proposed by the house or house member. Experts, academics, think tanks, and civil society organizations could take part in this process.

More broadly, the speakers underlined the importance of education. Education about how countries govern themselves was an essential tool for achieving the goal of bridging the gap between parliaments and the people. In particular, teachers played a crucial role not only in educating young people about their parliamentary democracy, but in helping to shape them as engaged citizens.

Now, more than ever, it was important to work in the spirit of the IPU's 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy. As a political system, democracy was the only system with the capacity for self-correction. If parliamentarians did not allow themselves to be corrected by their constituents, they would fail in bridging the gap between parliaments and the people.

## Panel discussion

### *Forging inclusive and sustainable economies that deliver well-being and justice for all*

The panel was opened by Ms. G. Cuevas Barron (IPU President) and Mr. J. Mudenda (Speaker of the National Assembly of Zimbabwe) as lead speakers. The expert panellists were: Ms. A. Alisjahbana (Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and Pacific) and Mr. A. Nuwagaba (Professor at Makerere University, Uganda).

Interventions from the (virtual) floor were made by the following: Mr. Z. Gombojav (Chairman of the State Great Hural of Mongolia); Mr. P. Wichitcholchai (President of the Senate of Thailand); Mr. S. Phokeer (Speaker of the National Assembly of Mauritius); Mr. A.D. Camara (Speaker of the National Assembly of Guinea); Mr. M.S. Sanjrani (President of the Senate of Pakistan); and Mr. P. Katjavivi (Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia). Mr. J. Pizarro (President of the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament) submitted written remarks.

Against the backdrop of the global recession and health crisis prompted by the ongoing COVID pandemic, the discussion looked critically at the prevailing growth-centric, unsustainable economic model as well as the drivers of inequality and exclusion in both developed and developing countries.

By highlighting dysfunctions that were already embedded in the system, the COVID-19 crisis called for rethinking economic, social and environmental policies across the board. The “paradox” of 20 per cent of the global population consuming 75 per cent of the planet’s resources stood as a clear illustration of the many imbalances that needed to be addressed.

Key to the renewal needed was a reform of the current patterns of consumption and production which demanded too much of mother earth and did not necessarily make life better. The global economy could not grow exponentially forever. While supporting people’s livelihoods was paramount, particularly in the face of widespread joblessness, that must not be done without regard for the environment on which all economic activity depended.

Economic models of circularity and solidarity already being pursued by some countries were the way forward. To “build back better”, massive investments were needed in green infrastructure and green industries as well as in creative job creation schemes and forms of income support (e.g. universal income). Actions to decarbonize the economy should be prioritized. In short, a Green New Deal of the scale of the post-Second World War Marshall Plan was needed in each country.

Clearly, creating a more inclusive economy would require a new fiscal policy to generate or redistribute revenue. Parliaments needed to exercise strong budget oversight to make sure taxes were levied more fairly, with more of the burden on those who could afford it, and moneys appropriated to target the most vulnerable first. That some developing countries spent more on defence than on health or education illustrated the extent to which governments disregarded people’s priorities. From the people’s perspective, what was needed right now was more economic stimulus and more public investments in health care and income support, including possibly through direct cash payments to households.

In the final analysis, the key to all these reforms was good governance. Dysfunctional institutions that did not represent all interests and groups and were prone to corruption led to disastrous policy outcomes. This in turn generated unrest and social conflict, which made for a bad business environment for investors, leading to economic stagnation or recession. Developing countries in particular needed to focus more on fixing their governance institutions as a way of stimulating human and capital resources that already existed in their midst. Endogenous development practices that built self-reliance should be prioritized. Foreign aid and other types of external interventions were no panacea and could not replace homegrown solutions.



In addition to national reforms, changes were needed to the whole international economic and financial architecture according to the principle of solidarity. Developing countries continued to be underrepresented on the boards of the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and other such multilateral organizations of global economic governance. More inclusive globalization was needed to better reflect the real needs of people as well as the interests of developing countries.

Parliaments needed to be more proactive in effecting the change that people needed. To this end, they needed to be more inclusive of all people through more open multi-stakeholder processes as well as more targeted policies and structures (e.g. a dedicated youth committee or gender equality committee). In sum, laws and budgets must aim more explicitly at the common good.

## Special event

### *Countering terrorism and violent extremism: The perspective of victims*

The panel began with a testimony from Mr. I. Alhaji Buba, a young victim of terrorism and founder of the Youth Coalition Against Terrorism (YOCAT). His testimony was followed by presentations by the lead Speakers: Mr. W. Sobotka (President of the Austrian National Council); Ms. B. Argimón (President of the General Assembly and of the Senate of Uruguay); and Mr. R. Lopatka (Austrian MP, Chair of the IPU High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (HLAG)). The expert panellists were: Ms. G. Fathi Waly (Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV) and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)) and Mr. V. Voronkov (Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT)).

Interventions from the (virtual) floor were made by the following: Mr. A. Alsaleh (Chairperson of the Shura Council of Bahrain); Mr. M.B. Ghalibaf (Speaker of the Islamic Parliament of Iran); Mr. A. Qaiser (Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan); Mr. A. Mirzoyan (Chairperson of the National Assembly of Armenia); and Mr. A. Farrugia (Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta).

As it was convened on the eve of the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, the special event focused specifically on the perspective of victims and how parliamentarians could support them. The event started with the testimony of Mr. I. Alhaji Buba, a Nigerian Boko Haram victim and founder of YOCAT, a volunteer-based coalition of over 600 youths that offered counselling services to victims of terrorism and provided counter-radical peace education and skills training for unemployed youths in Nigeria.

Mr. I. Alhaji Buba, the lead Speakers and expert panellists all underlined that the needs of victims of terrorism were still not being met. Those needs included: legal protection, education, financial assistance, livelihood programmes, as well as psychological support and health care, especially for those living in crowded, unsanitary conditions in camps for displaced people. The COVID-19 pandemic had brought additional traumas, feelings of isolation and invisibility, and stress for victims. Services had slowed down or been suspended, and funds had been redirected. Promoting, protecting and respecting the human rights of victims was as important as ever: when victims' needs were not met, it eroded their resilience and undermined the sustainability and inclusivity of communities.

It was important to listen to and make known the voices of victims to design appropriate measures to support them. The attending parliamentarians confirmed their preparedness to do so. Victims' voices were important tools in countering the narratives of terrorists, were credible, and united communities against violence. By sharing their experiences and conveying the human cost of terrorist acts, victims shattered terrorist narratives and justifications for violence. In its publication launched on 21 August, UNODC applauded victims who chose to serve as messengers. The publication set out strategic approaches to supporting victims in telling their stories and helping them engage with society at large and contribute to peace.

Assistance must be provided to parliaments and governments to translate international resolutions into national legislation and action and so help reduce the existing significant differences in national approaches to supporting victims. Such differences were an obstacle to the global recognition of victims' rights and effective national implementation of international commitments.

Through their Joint Programme on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism, the IPU, UNODC and UNOCT were supporting the drafting of recommended legal provisions on victims based on international principles which could be easily adapted to national contexts. The provisions would be published in 2021. One of the main goals of the Joint Programme, and specifically its recognition of the role of parliamentarians as representatives of the people, was to increase efforts to narrow the gap between words and action. Countries must follow through on international resolutions by ensuring that legislation in support of victims was in place and was implemented. But the role of parliaments went beyond legislative work. They also had an important role in allocating budgets and resources, as well as developing strategies and measures for governments to adequately support victims, with a special focus on women and children.

During the debate, important points relating to counter-terrorism as a whole were also raised. Participants expressed their dedication to fighting terrorism and referred to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Parliaments must scale up efforts to implement the Strategy and continue investing in multilateralism and international cooperation, which were of crucial importance in the fight against terrorism. It was important to disassociate religion from violence and terror and to refute terrorist narratives by promoting values of tolerance, coexistence, and respect for all religions. Education was also a key component in the efforts to counter terrorist narratives and hate speech and to prevent violent extremism.

The issue of financing terrorism through money laundering also featured prominently in the speakers' statements. Parliaments had an important role in fighting that phenomenon through the enactment of relevant legislation. As anti-money-laundering controls evolved, criminals continued to find new ways to transform proceeds from criminal activity into legitimate funds, including through exploiting the vulnerabilities of cross-border trade. Effective information-sharing, better control of financial instruments, and increased transparency were of crucial importance in fighting the financing of terrorism and money laundering.

## Adoption of the Declaration and closing remarks

Introducing the draft Declaration, the IPU President lauded the highly democratic and inclusive process of debating and amending the text over successive drafts to reach a version that garnered consensus. A preparatory committee – made up of representatives elected by each of the IPU geopolitical groups as well as representatives of the IPU Forum of Women Parliamentarians and Forum of Young Parliamentarians – had been entrusted with that task.

In the months over which the process had taken place, the theme – parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet – had only become *more* relevant and timely. The evolution of the text had therefore echoed the evolution of the COVID-19 crisis and had been shaped by parliamentary experiences and responses in such unprecedented times. Rightly, COVID-19 was a common thread running throughout, but the Declaration also sought to look beyond the crisis, to the bigger issues and longer-term needs of the people and planet.

Members of the Preparatory Committee representing each of the geopolitical groups took the floor to highlight the value of the Declaration and urge the Speakers to adopt the robust, comprehensive and aspirational text that would help pave the way for stronger multilateralism and international cooperation and solidarity, especially in light of the current global crisis.

The Declaration was adopted by consensus and presented to the President of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, who thanked parliaments and the IPU for bringing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations over the past 75 years. He congratulated the Speakers of parliament for their constructive engagement with the wide range of issues addressed during the conference. The parliaments of the world were at the heart of inclusive decision-making, shaping policies and making laws that responded to the needs of citizens. In 2020, a year disrupted by COVID-19 but nevertheless the start of the decade of action for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he urged parliamentarians to maintain their support for the SDGs and to pursue the commitments set out in their Declaration, particularly on gender equality.

Closing the conference, the President said that the voice of parliaments had been heard loud and clear. Now it was up to every national parliament and parliamentarian to take up the torch and build on what had been achieved. The conference had been an important platform for deepening ties with the United Nations and the IPU's other partners, very much in keeping with the theme of more effective multilateralism.

The virtual meeting had proved that technology could be harnessed to serve parliamentary diplomacy and leadership, but there was no substitute for face-to-face interaction. She said that the IPU Governing Council in November 2020 would be called upon to approve the recommendation to hold the in-person segment of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Vienna in 2021.

# 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.

(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.

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\* A limited number of delegations expressed reservations on the Declaration (see page 25 for more details).

(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.

## Report of the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

The 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliament of the Republic of Austria and held virtually on 17 and 18 August 2020. It brought together 28 women Speakers of Parliament from 26 countries to discuss **Women's parliamentary leadership in a time of COVID-19 and recovery** and the means to step up equality between men and women, building on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### Taking the management of emergencies to the next level

The women Speakers pointed out that, as the effects of crises were never gender-neutral, it was only to have been expected that the COVID-19 pandemic would expose and further amplify the full impact of existing gender-based inequalities. They noted that while women were on the frontlines in disease response, when it came to being at the decision-making table in times of crisis, women of great scientific and medical capacity and in-depth knowledge of challenges faced on the ground, were simply sidelined.

Overall, women's leadership in the political sphere remained low. The facts were telling: only slightly more than 10 per cent of countries in the world were led by a woman, women held 25 per cent of parliamentary seats, and just over 20 per cent of parliamentary speakerships worldwide.

Women Speakers shared country level developments in curbing that challenging reality:

- In Mexico, thanks to the equal representation of women and participation of women legislators in parliament, many gender-related economic, social, educational and rights issues that had to be resolved to ensure a better quality of life for women were placed on Parliament's agenda.
- In Japan, lessons learned from the management of past disasters paved the way to promote gender-based perspectives into the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In Moldova, the 2016 law was being implemented that stipulated that women must make up at least 40 per cent of government members and candidates on party lists would step up efforts to increase women's participation.
- In the Russian Federation, the National Action Strategy for Women was being actively implemented and supplemented with new content to support women's capacities and skills competences in information, digital, high-tech and knowledge-intensive industries. Fifty per cent of girls were interested in studies and careers in the field of exact sciences.
- In Zimbabwe, a constitutional amendment – guided by the moto "50/50 or no deal" – empowered women in parliament to advocate for an equal share of the political pie.

Women Speakers paid tribute to the women who led States and governments and who demonstrated how women in power could effectively respond to crises by acting swiftly, with compassion and a people-centered approach, and applying science-based decision-making. As in any crisis, women had delivered. The women speakers recommended greater recognition of the positive impact of women's leadership and more robust advocacy for women's leadership in all fields, including politics, science and health. To that end, they stressed the IPU's call for parity (50/50) in parliament and in political decision-making positions.

A gender-responsive approach was the right and most efficient approach. The Speakers recommended that any emergency response and recovery legislation, policy, programme, and related budgets, must take into full consideration the specific needs and interests of women and girls, based on sex disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender impact assessment, and in consultation with gender experts and women and girls as key stakeholders.

### Stepping up women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion

Women Speakers underlined that women's economic security and empowerment were being severely affected by the pandemic due to existing and persisting inequalities and gender-based discrimination. Despite progress on many fronts, over 2.5 billion women and girls around the world were affected by discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection.

The Speakers stressed that women's economic empowerment started with equality in law that must regulate the status of women and girls in society.

The following examples of good practices experienced at national level were shared by women Speakers:

- In Zimbabwe, women's development banks had been established and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Corporation (SMEDCO) provided working capital to promote micro, small and medium enterprises, and cooperatives while targeting women and youth.
- In Belarus, Parliament was working to put in place specific measures to ensure gender-responsive support for women entrepreneurs.
- In Bahrain, the campaign "Together", which had been launched during the COVID-19 crisis, was providing economic support to women to reconcile job responsibilities and family duties, in addition to sustaining of their participation in the labour market.
- In Mozambique, actions were being undertaken to empower rural women and facilitate their integration into the productive sector. Micro credits were being promoted to finance income generation and self-employment projects.
- In the Russian Federation, Parliament introduced statutory regulations on remote work, digital services, and distance education. Measures, such as financial support to parents who had lost their jobs, had been taken to assist families with children. Thousands of women thus maintained financial stability.
- In Moldova, measures to monitor the implementation of gender equality related policies were being taken and a gender-sensitive statistical data system had been developed. Also, parental leave for men had been introduced to promote better sharing of parental responsibilities among women and men.
- In Finland, the focus was on having more women in technology and to act as agents of change as businesswomen, developers and investors to make the technology sector more gender responsive and free of structural inequality and biases. The objective was to offer better opportunities for the employment of women, and for women to establish and run businesses.
- In Rwanda, several laws had contributed to accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment and access to financial services, including equal rights in inheritance and succession, in access to and ownership of land, and in employment and equal pay. In addition, the engendered national budget helped redirect public expenditures and revenues towards the needs and interests of both men and women.

The women Speakers called for accelerating change by amending, repealing and eliminating laws that discriminated against women and girls; passing legislation that contributed to advancing gender equality; and overseeing the effective implementation of gender-responsive legislation.

To contribute to empowering women in the economy and at work, the women Speakers committed to address the unequal share of unpaid care work and gaps in social protection, and to eliminate the gender pay gap. They also called for more robust efforts to combat early marriage and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation to protect and empower girls.

### **Putting an end to sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament and all walks of life**

The women Speakers recognized that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women's physical and psychological security was at greater risk. Violence against women had reached shocking proportions before the pandemic, with 137 women killed every day globally by a member of their own family. Lockdown restrictions, economic stress and fear had led to an increase in gender-based violence, sexual and domestic violence, online violence, and other forms of violence against women. Child marriage and other harmful practices which were exacerbated in the contexts of conflict, violent extremism, terrorism, displacement and migration, had witnessed a substantial rise as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

The women Speakers expressed strong concern over some countries' intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Instead, bolder action was needed to enact comprehensive legislation that criminalized – in line with international standards – all forms of sexual and gender-based violence everywhere and to ensure that such legislation was survivor-centered, that it recognized survivors as rights holders, and ensured compensation by perpetrators. Such legislation must be carefully resourced and fully implemented.

The prevalence of violence against women in parliament was alarmingly high as revealed by the IPU surveys on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament and as experienced by so many women MPs. The women Speakers stressed the urgency of dealing with the issue as a matter of priority.

The women Speakers lauded the efforts of many of their colleagues to fight gender-based violence in their parliament. The following were some examples that were shared by the participants:

- In 2019 in Norway, in the wake of the IPU landmark studies on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament and of the #MeToo movement, Parliament had initiated an internal survey which had revealed cases of bullying, harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour against women MPs and staff. To ensure a safe work environment for all, Parliament introduced zero-tolerance towards such behaviour.
- In Madagascar, the internal rules of Parliament and the code of ethics and deontology for MPs were amended to address all forms of threats and sexual harassment against women MPs.
- In Argentina, a private member's bill –approved by the Senate and awaiting adoption by the Chamber of Deputies – provided for criminal punishment for persons who disseminated or shared with third parties another person's private messages that disclosed intimate parts or were of a sexual nature without express authorization of the concerned person.

Parliaments, their leaders and members were urged to condemn and sanction any acts of harassment, intimidation and violence against women in parliament, including online and in social media, and to carry out surveys to reveal the prevalence of such acts.

It was strongly recommended that the IPU's Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament be used to establish internal comprehensive policies to prevent and eliminate any form of violence against women in parliament, set up effective complaint and investigation mechanisms, foresee disciplinary sanctions against perpetrators, provide confidential access to assistance for victims, raise awareness and provide training programmes for all people working in parliament.

Efforts towards gender equality must be matched with the necessary funding. It was important to scale up investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Budgets that responded more effectively to the specific needs of women and girls in all sectors must be secured. Also, during the pandemic, health-related resources must not be diverted from the specific needs of women and girls, including of survivors of violence and those in need of sexual and reproductive health care and services.

The pandemic was jeopardizing the collective successes of recent years in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals relating to women and girls and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The crisis had shuffled priorities and exacerbated inequalities. However, it was felt that it had also opened opportunities to challenge the preceding order and its old patterns and to build back better. The women Speakers therefore called for furthering inter-parliamentary cooperation and support, and for gender equality to be at the core of parliamentary responses in a post-COVID-19 world.

The women Speakers discussed preparations for the next Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament and recommended that a preparatory committee be established for that purpose.

**Opening address by the President of the  
National Council of Austria,  
*Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka***

"As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role to play in meeting the current challenges. It is therefore crucial that we also see the corona pandemic as an opportunity to acknowledge the great value and strength of a functioning parliamentary democracy."

Madam President,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Distinguished colleagues,

It was more than a year ago that the Austrian Parliament was chosen to host this conference. Since that time we have been preparing intensively for the world's largest meeting of parliaments under the auspices of the IPU. For the first time in history, this conference was to take place in Vienna.

Since the corona pandemic has made it impossible for us to come together in Vienna in person, we would like you to consider this virtual exchange as a token of the unbroken multilateral cooperation between parliaments, including – and, perhaps, especially – in times of crisis.

While video conferences and digital diplomacy will never be able to replace face-to-face meetings and dialogue, they offer us the opportunity to share views and ideas under these very special circumstances and to fill the cooperation between parliaments with content and life.

This is why it gives me great pleasure that we have managed to arrange for today and tomorrow an interesting programme that addresses the current challenges.

In the programme you will find discussions and presentations on areas as diverse as health, climate, economy, science and technology, as well as the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. We will address the tasks of parliaments in empowering women and children and in encouraging youth participation in the political decision-making process. We will also talk about migration and mobility and the role of parliaments in the 21st century.

To my mind, the wide range of topics covered is an unmistakable token of how important and enriching multilateral exchanges are for the work of our parliaments worldwide.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you all for not shying away from the challenge of daring to try something new and for organising, for the first time, a virtual segment for a Conference of Speakers of Parliaments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its outbreak, the corona pandemic has spread across the globe like wildfire. It has become a global challenge for our health systems, for our economies and for the social security of our populations.

But it also represents a litmus test for parliamentary democracy and the values upon which it is founded.

Many democracies were forced to take tough decisions during the corona crisis when it came to restricting fundamental freedoms. Situations such as these represent a challenge to the resilience of our democratic and constitutional structures. Crisis management will only work well if parliaments are involved.

As far as I am concerned, this is one of the key lessons to be drawn from the corona pandemic.

As guardians of democracy and the rule of law, parliaments have a key role to play in meeting the current challenges. It is therefore crucial that we also see the corona pandemic as an opportunity to acknowledge the great value and strength of a functioning parliamentary democracy.

As mentioned earlier, I firmly believe that video conferences such as this one can be a well-functioning and efficient tool for multilateral exchanges between parliaments. But they can never replace face-to-face meetings and direct dialogue.

For this reason, I am particularly pleased that our virtual segment of today and tomorrow constitutes only the first part of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and that the second part will take place in physical form in Vienna in the summer of 2021. I am grateful to the IPU bodies for having taken this decision.

The Austrian Parliament will be just as delighted and ready to host this conference next year.

Let me conclude by wishing you all successful and exciting discussions over the next two days. It would give me great pleasure to be able to continue this exchange in person in Vienna during the second part of the World Conference.

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

### *Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron*

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 per cent 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?

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 beaucoup!  
Shukran yazilan!



## Opening address by the United Nations Secretary-General

### *Mr. António Guterres*

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 COP 26 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 75th 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.

## Closing speech by the President of the United Nations General Assembly

**H.E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande**

Excellencies  
Speakers of Parliaments  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here at the conclusion of a successful Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments which discussed *parliamentary responses to the pandemic as well as themes including global governance, sustainable economies and the climate emergency*.

I am grateful to Ms. Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and members of the preparatory committee for their leadership. I also thank the speakers of parliaments that participated in this event for their constructive engagement in the process.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has facilitated dialogue among parliamentarians and offers practical support to its member parliaments since 1889. This support is crucial to promoting peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment and sustainable development through political dialogue, cooperation and parliamentary action.

In these trying times brought about by the emergence of COVID-19, the support of parliaments around the world is important, as they facilitate government's effort to effectively tackle the consequence of the pandemic.

It is gratifying that today, you successfully adopted a declaration on "parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet", and reaffirmed the principles of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, promotion of fundamental rights of the individual, etcetera.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A lot of ground was covered across the various work streams during the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. I am grateful for the candid exchange of views on Climate change (and the Paris Agreement), issue of Migration and Refugees, Counter Terrorism and so on.

Effective parliaments around the globe make a difference in our lives, as they are at the heart of inclusive decision-making, shaping policies and making laws which respond to the needs of citizens.

Your tireless efforts amidst the pandemic have carried forward the vision of a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations where ideas are shared, and optimism is nurtured.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2020 was supposed to kickstart the Decade of Action and Delivery for the Sustainable Development Goals. The emergence of COVID-19 earlier in the year is capable of disrupting this. However, if we continue to support each other, we can reduce the effect of the pandemic on the livelihood of billions of people around the world.

I therefore encourage parliaments around the world to continue to be involved in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, by strengthening their governments to cooperate more substantively with the international community.

Also, I call upon the international community to stand up for and protect gender equality in all its forms and manifestations as stated in the declaration adopted today.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For 75 years, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations have worked side by side and created a lasting impact along the way. May the great spirit of cooperation continue to grow stronger.

Thank you.

## Conference Report

### *Decade of action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

1. The adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development signaled an increasingly coherent international vision of sustainable development. Together they seek to move away from the siloed approaches and individual sector goals that characterized the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era to a more integrated and mutually interdependent landscape. Having created this new international framework, the next challenge is to implement these agreements in a coherent way at the national level. In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to achieve the SDGs.

2. The 2030 Agenda was adopted in September 2015 as the most important UN declaration on the world's many economic, social and environmental challenges. At its core lie 17 SDGs, articulated in 169 targets, designed to eradicate extreme poverty and drastically reduce other forms of deprivation and inequality while setting the planet on a sustainable course.

3. The SDGs constitute an integrated framework in which progress on each goal is dependent on the advancement of all the other goals. The framework applies to all countries, developed and developing alike, requiring intentional action in their own domestic jurisdictions as well as collective action through international cooperation. The SDGs reflect a solid human rights perspective and a common vision of the future that all countries can aspire to.

4. The IPU participated actively in the negotiations for the SDGs through parliamentary consultations followed by advocacy before the relevant UN committees and other forums. As a result, paragraph 45 of the 2030 Agenda acknowledges specifically the role of parliaments in supporting the implementation of the goals through legislation and government oversight. As part of the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development group at the United Nations, the IPU helped secure a strong commitment to “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”, which includes parliaments, as part of Goal 16.

5. Endorsed by all UN Member States, the SDGs are globally owned, and expectations from their implementation are high. The goals will not come to fruition without strong political will and citizen action. Parliaments and parliamentarians should be at the forefront of this effort. Despite limited resources, the IPU is doing all it can, in partnership with its Members and the United Nations, to support the implementation of the SDGs through the world's parliaments.

#### **IPU work on the SDGs**

6. Having embraced the 2030 Agenda and attendant SDGs from the very beginning, the IPU has since worked to integrate the SDGs in its 2017–2021 Strategy, ensuring that all work is consistent with or directly supportive of the SDGs.

7. The IPU Strategy takes a two-pronged approach: it seeks to help parliaments institutionalize the SDGs as an indivisible framework; at the same time, it pursues specific actions to support those goals that are most relevant to the work of the IPU or where the IPU has a comparative advantage, such as SDG 3 on health, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 13 on climate change, SDG 16 on governance, and SDG 17 on means of implementation (development cooperation). The IPU's work also focuses on some of the other key issues, such as hunger and poverty.

8. The action line on institutionalization aims ultimately at making parliaments “fit for purpose”, that is ensuring that parliaments have the right institutional, legal, technical and policymaking tools to perform their legislative, oversight and representative roles with regard to the SDGs. This is done through self-assessment and with the help of a dedicated IPU-UNDP toolkit. This approach has helped a number of parliaments (e.g. Fiji, Georgia, Mali, Serbia, etc.) come up with a multi-year parliamentary action plan on the SDGs. The self-assessment approach to the SDGs is consistent with the IPU's overarching democracy-building mission.

9. As the under-representation of women and youth in decision-making and economic opportunity continues to be one of the main stumbling blocks to progress on sustainable development and peace, much of the IPU's work on the SDGs today incorporates a gender and youth perspective. This includes mainstreaming gender equality, women's rights and youth needs and interests in project work by spotlighting their particular needs and advocating for corresponding policy reforms.

10. The underlying objective of the IPU's work on the SDGs is to empower parliaments so that they:

- have the appropriate internal structures and processes to identify and support the SDG policies that are right for their respective countries
- ensure that a national SDG plan domesticating the global goals is in place and that all government policies are commensurate with the country's sustainable development challenges
- provide for adequate budgetary allocations and other means of implementation that are needed to advance the national SDG plan
- actively engage with all citizens, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, to promote the SDGs and garner feedback on the implementation of the national SDG plan.

11. At the operational level, the IPU's work on the SDGs takes different forms, from the organization of national and regional seminars, and the publication of guidance notes and toolkits, to the adoption of SDG-related resolutions and the organization of specialized panel discussions at IPU Assemblies. More than 134 parliaments have been involved in the IPU's SDG activities around the world thus far. Overall, these activities help build appreciation amongst MPs that the SDGs are aligned with the national development objectives of both developed and developing countries and not an abstract agenda detached from their everyday reality. The activities also focus on bridging theory and practice with field visits to projects promoting sustainability and prosperity.

12. In addition, the IPU works to connect parliaments to UN processes designed to monitor progress toward the SDGs at national and global levels and to maintain the political momentum for the 2030 Agenda. Key among these processes is the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development that meets annually at the ministerial level and every four years at the Head-of-State level. The IPU organizes a dedicated parliamentary event at each HLPF and contributes to relevant UN documents and resolutions. In addition to reviewing a number of UN reports on the SDGs and discussing challenges and future course corrections, the HLPF hosts a number of voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Countries participating in VNRs are expected to review their own progress in consultation with parliaments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and to present their findings to the HLPF.

13. A global IPU survey, *Institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the work of parliaments*, was conducted among all parliaments to help the IPU document and publicize how parliaments organize their SDG-related work. The results showed that the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs varied. Over half of the parliaments surveyed had established mechanisms specifically dedicated to the SDGs but only in a quarter of parliaments was this work coordinated with other parliamentary bodies. Also, in over half of the cases, the government had reported to parliament on SDG progress.

14. Among the many actions of the IPU to keep the spotlight on the SDGs, the following should be highlighted:

- Every April session of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs is dedicated to a review of parliamentary actions for the SDGs and to a discussion of the main theme of that year's forthcoming HLPF session.
- In preparation for the VNRs for the HLPF session, the IPU notifies the relevant parliaments of the process and asks them to report back (by way of a questionnaire) on their involvement throughout the relevant period. Some of the reports to the HLPF have been jointly presented by representatives of government and parliament.
- A parliamentary event is held at each HLPF to highlight the main points of the session and encourage further parliamentary engagement going forward.
- On the basis of a parliamentary self-assessment toolkit prepared with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the IPU helps national parliaments to improve their own legislative and oversight capacities for the SDGs (parliaments as diverse as those of Djibouti, Fiji, and Serbia have made use of this toolkit to date). Some parliaments, like the National Assembly of Viet Nam and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, have translated the toolkit into local languages.

- The IPU Member Parliaments prioritize regional interaction as a means to engage in SDG implementation, access the latest data and expertise, and learn from the experiences of other parliaments. Twenty-one regional and interregional seminars organized so far by the IPU have brought together more than 1,000 parliamentarians from 134 parliaments from all regions of the world.

### Scorecard and lessons learned

15. The SDG scorecard that the United Nations and associated research organizations prepare each year presents a mixed view indicating slow progress overall. Currently, every country is facing some degree of difficulties being on track to fully achieve all the SDGs. While many countries are making significant progress on several SDGs, at the same time, other countries are backsliding or stagnating on more than one of the SDGs.

16. Globally, while extreme poverty is trending down, inequality is stuck at very high levels, hunger is on the rise, biodiversity and basic ecosystems are losing their regenerating capacity, the global climate is changing much faster than expected, and key institutions of democracy are under severe threat, resulting in growing social unrest and conflict. On a more positive note, there are encouraging signs of improved health and education, more access to electricity, and less unemployment. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences would no doubt lead to regression in these and other areas. In addition to this immediate challenge, one of the most urgent areas for action is climate change which remains at the top of global agenda. This illustrated the need to redouble our efforts to work individually and collectively to reach the goal in the scheduled time frame. A comprehensive picture of progress and setbacks globally and by country is provided in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/sdg-progress-reports-2019.html>) and the 2019 SDG Index and Dashboards of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (<https://www.sdgindex.org/reports/sustainable-development-report-2019/>).

17. By definition, developed countries have the advantage, and several of them are not far from achieving most of the SDGs. However, the headline SDG score of many developed countries may be lower when their “spillover effects” into developing countries are factored in. These effects (e.g. the impact of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on developing countries or of lax tax laws that allow for tax evasion) end up impacting developing countries that retard their own development.

18. Generally speaking, developing countries are facing greater challenges in delivering actual results, although their political commitment to the SDGs may be relatively stronger than in developed countries. The main reasons for the slower progress of developing countries come down to lack of resources, low implementation capacities (including for data collection and analysis), weaker governance, and a higher incidence of internal or external conflict. In fact, the paradox of achieving the SDGs is that the capacity to intensify SDG implementation in developing countries is significantly impacted by the very challenges that the SDGs seek to address. There is a strong need for continued and strengthened international development cooperation, with north–south cooperation as the main channel, supplemented by south–south cooperation.

19. From the IPU’s direct experience with the SDGs and parliaments the following key lessons can be drawn:

- Generally, it can be said that the political will in parliaments to engage on the SDGs needs to be strengthened. Parliaments are nevertheless much more aware of and demonstrate greater ownership of the SDGs than of their predecessor – the MDGs. This is owing to the wide-ranging consultations on SDG content and the subsequent work of the IPU and other organizations to raise awareness of the goals in parliaments.
- There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to the institutionalization of the SDGs in parliaments. Some parliaments have set up dedicated SDG committees or informal caucuses whereas others have assigned specific SDGs to existing portfolio committees. Most parliaments have yet to consider how to go about making sure that all of the SDGs have a clear locus in their committee structure. Overcoming siloes and working across goals is a key requirement for successful SDG mainstreaming.
- The results of the IPU surveys show that the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs varies. While examples of good practices have emerged, it appears that SDG implementation remains a process primarily led by governments. Work done on the VNRs confirmed this finding: only about one third of the parliaments from countries that presented reports to the

HLPF had been consulted in some way. This suggests that a lot remains to be done to ensure parliaments are fully enabled to exercise their oversight role when it comes to SDG policies and related monitoring processes. The lack of inclusion of parliaments in the governance frameworks for SDG implementation also diminishes the value of public involvement through their elected representatives in this regard.

- Regional and interregional parliamentary cooperation is very important. Virtually all the regional seminars that the IPU has organized over the last four years have shown the benefit of parliaments at roughly similar levels of development coming together to exchange best practices and generally support each other.
- Climate change is one of the greatest threats to global prosperity and development. IPU activities have shown that there is strong political will in parliaments to learn about and engage on climate change issues. At the same time, serious deficiencies were revealed, such as lack of knowledge and capacity to coordinate activities with the government and effectively contribute to ongoing national processes to translate the Paris Agreement into national legislation and action. Our parliaments bear significant responsibility to monitor the progress of our respective governments.
- Access to quality data disaggregated by gender, minority status, age, regional area and other such categories is needed to help parliaments make informed policy decisions. Many parliaments lack access to reliable and independent data which can help them hold their governments to account.

### **Decade of action**

20. In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to achieve the SDGs. He called for action on three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions; local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and people action, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

21. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the vulnerability of all humanity, irrespective of sovereignty, ideology or religion. It has highlighted the uneven impact of such global threats on all economies regardless of the varying levels of development. The COVID-19 pandemic has unavoidably led to serious setbacks in the work to reach the SDGs. We must therefore do our utmost to minimize its adverse effects. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic also illustrates the strength and value of human ingenuity and resourcefulness. The SDGs are geared towards strengthening the resilience of people, country and planet, and parliaments must assume their central role in ensuring their successful achievement.

22. With 2020 marking the start of the SDG Decade of Action and the entry into effect of the Paris Agreement, parliaments must take action, now more than ever, to set the planet on a sustainable path. Many of them will need further assistance to deliver on a range of challenging issues, including ending poverty, ensuring gender equality, delivering better health coverage, and taking decisive climate action. Special emphasis will need to be paid to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inequalities it unearths, particularly in the area of gender, employment and climate change. Parliaments will need to take and support measures to re-stimulate the economy in a sustainable way, to deliver for the people while preserving the environment.

23. The IPU and its Member Parliaments will need to step up their efforts to rally political will and promote parliamentary engagement with the 2030 Agenda, including through action plans tailored to the needs of individual countries. Parliamentarians should encourage an open, public and free debate in society about the importance of the SDGs across all sectors in order to enhance the awareness of the challenges at stake and increase pressure for political solutions. Focus needs to be put on practical ways to turn the goals into reality, such as finding solutions in the key areas of legislation and financing so that the SDGs are reflected in national budgets. In the spirit of multilateralism, Member Parliaments shall utilize parliamentary diplomacy to push forward the 2030 Agenda in regional and sub-regional inter-Parliamentary forums. This is at the core of IPU's mandate. It is up to us all to make this vision a reality for the betterment of mankind.



## Conference Report

### *Stepping up youth participation in politics and parliaments: From words to action*

#### **The demographic dividend of youth**

Young people under the age of 30 make up around half of the world population.<sup>1</sup> Around a quarter of the world population is between the ages of 15 and 30.<sup>2</sup>

Decision-making must be responsive, inclusive and representative. This democratic process requires strong participation of all people, especially youth. This is not only true because they account for a high proportion of the world population, but also because how they relate to politics largely determines the health of our democracies today and in the future. Excluding young people in their formative years can lead to their disillusionment and lack of trust in our institutions, which weakens those institutions' legitimacy.

The second category of young people, aged 15 to 30, is made up of 1.8 billion individuals. This group is as diverse as the world they live in. These young people have shared needs, such as accessible quality education to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow; availability of decent work; equality among boys and girls and men and women; and a planet that is healthy, clean, and sustainable. With the bulk of their lives ahead of them, young men and women have the highest stake in today's action – or inactions – and have a right to be included in decision-making on these and all other issues that affect them. As IPU young MPs have often repeated, **“No decisions about us, without us!”**.

The political participation of youth is not only the *right* thing to work towards; it is also the *smart* thing to do. Harnessing the perspectives, new ideas, and energy of young people is indispensable in the broader efforts to address key issues which affect people of all ages, such as achieving the SDGs, peace and security, the right to education, to health and to social protection, gender equality, equal socio-economic and political opportunities, and fighting climate change. Youth are an innovative force that have much to contribute to these collective efforts. Ensuring full engagement of young men and women in the democratic process at all levels, and starting such engagement as early as possible through democracy education, are priority objectives that should be high on the political agenda.

Parliaments must exchange good practices and successful experiences in political, democratic and parliamentary education programmes that increase the interest of youth in the political process in general and in parliamentary work in particular, as well as their involvement and their training in good practices.

The political empowerment of young people brings new perspectives to politics and how it is done. Political institutions must be agile to respond to a fast-changing world facing new challenges and threats to humankind. They must constantly change and adapt with the times so that they reflect the societies that nourish them. As “natives” of the modern era and at the vanguard of new approaches and technologies, youth are best placed to drive the renewal of political institutions, including parliaments, so that they are more representative, responsive and effective, no matter the environment. Efforts should be made to foster an effective and meaningful youth contribution to all stages of the policy- and law-making cycle: from design to implementation and evaluation. Young people make a direct contribution whose impact on decision-making within their own communities is significant. Consequently, they can effectively engage in political decision-making processes at the national, regional and international levels.

Young people will be more affected by decisions taken on longer-term issues like climate change, environmental sustainability and political instability. Without the youth's active participation, the laws and policies passed by parliament and government may be detrimental to their interests, both today and in the future.<sup>3</sup> As such, enhancing youth participation can contribute to and is needed for better policymaking.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*. ST/ESA/SER.A/423 (New York, 2019): [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf).

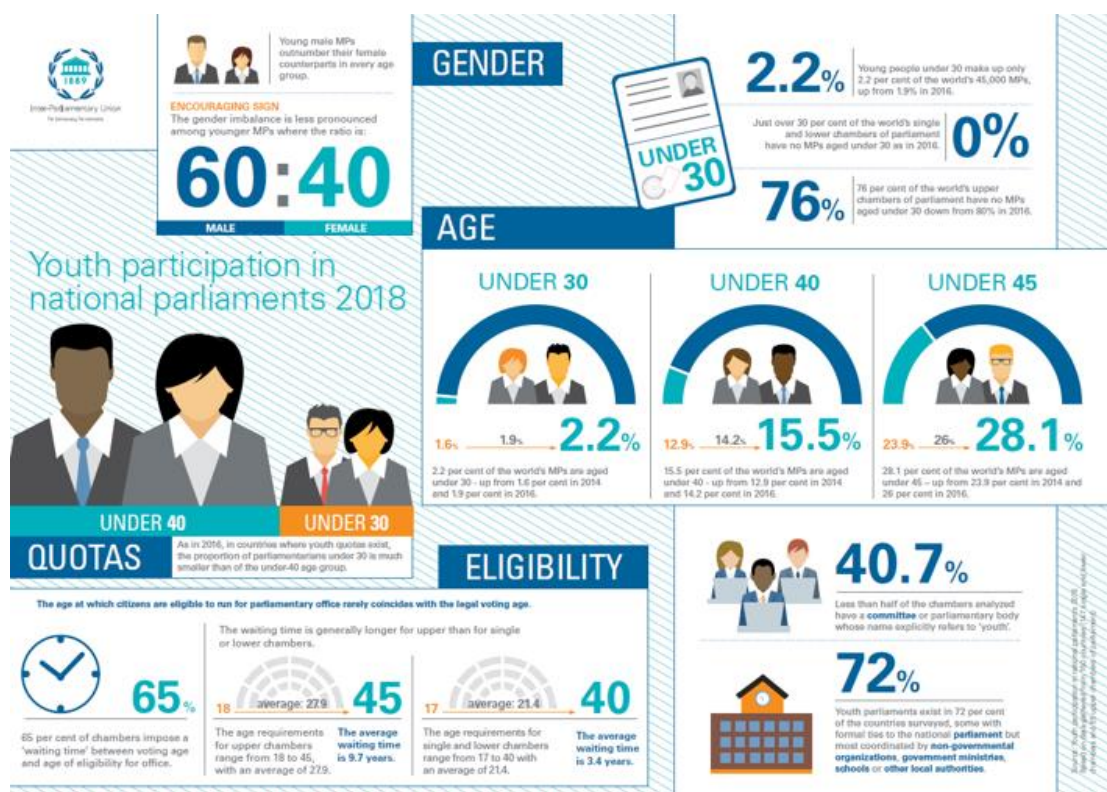
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> IPU, *Youth participation in national parliaments: 2018* (2018).

## Current state of youth participation in parliament and politics

Despite the world having more young people today than ever before, youth are severely underrepresented in politics and parliaments. According to IPU data, only 2.2 per cent of parliamentarians are under 30.<sup>4</sup> Disproportionate underrepresentation continues even when looking at percentages of parliamentarians under 40 and 45 years of age (see figure below). IPU research has also revealed that slightly over 30 per cent of the world's single and lower chambers of parliament – and more than three-quarters of upper chambers – have no MPs aged under 30. Sixty-five per cent of parliaments also impose a “waiting period” between when young people can vote and when they can be eligible for office.

Young women are doubly disadvantaged. In all age ranges, men continue to outnumber women in parliaments. However, one encouraging sign is that the proportion of men and women MPs is more balanced the younger the age cohort. This suggests that increased youth participation may be an vehicle for achieving real gender parity in politics.



In the five years since the IPU began collecting data on youth participation in parliaments, global trends have been inching in positive directions. In 2018, the percentage of young MPs under 30 years of age grew to 2.2 per cent from 1.6 per cent in 2014. The proportion of young MPs under 40 years of age grew to 15.5 per cent from 12.9 per cent. Yet despite incremental progress, the world is nowhere near an equitable level of youth participation.

### Barriers facing youth

There are many barriers impeding young men and women from running for political office or being politically active. Although these may vary from country to country, a number of common challenges can be highlighted:

- Young people face legal barriers in many countries, with 65 per cent of countries having a minimum age to hold office that is higher than the voting age. Globally, young people must wait on average 3.4 years after they are eligible to vote before they can take office in lower chambers. In upper chambers, this waiting period is even longer, at 9.7 years.
- In many contexts there are also financial impediments for young people to run for office. Nominations to parties and election campaigns can be expensive. Young prospective candidates often do not have the financial means either to qualify for elections or to competitively run against better resourced candidates.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- Negative norms that portray formal politics as being for senior individuals are a persistent obstacle. Around the world, there is often a mentality that young people are “not yet ready” for the responsibility of holding office. Politics is also typically regarded as a space for politically experienced persons. As a result, young people are systematically marginalized because of their age, limited opportunities, and perceived lack of experience. There is a perception that youth are inexperienced in politics, suggesting that they should wait for their turn to run for political office. This stems from the belief that a certain level of knowledge, experience and maturity is required to successfully meet the many demands placed upon parliamentarians. This can cause resentment among young people and discourage their interest in political engagement.
- There is also the perception that young politicians lack the name recognition and the access to crucial networks that are needed to gain attention, be nominated by political parties and become viable candidates.
- Disengagement with formal politics leads many young people to feel that “formal” politics is simply beyond them. Some do not know where to start, or do not wish to join a party or a political institution (parliament) that they feel disillusioned with.
- Young women are often expected to assume family responsibilities, for example taking care of young children. Parliaments that are not gender-sensitive may in such cases also be an impediment. Furthermore, women MPs, especially young women, often face additional barriers – such as gender discrimination and other forms of gender-based violence – deterring them from running for office.<sup>5</sup>

### IPU action

Responding to this situation, in 2010 the IPU adopted the resolution *Youth participation in the democratic process* at the 122nd IPU Assembly in Thailand.<sup>6</sup> It called on parliaments, governments and political parties to take comprehensive legal and policy action to enhance youth participation in politics.

*In 2020, the IPU will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the resolution on youth in the democratic process.*

The resolution went beyond calling for increased youth consultation in political processes by also calling for increased direct youth representation in decision-making.

It proposed concrete measures, such as the introduction of youth quotas, alignment of the minimum age of eligibility for parliament with the voting age, enhancement of youth in political parties, and political education to stimulate active citizenship. The resolution also laid the foundations for the establishment of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians, which was subsequently created in 2013 and serves as a statutory body of the IPU committed to youth empowerment.

The IPU took further action in 2016, when it held a general debate entitled *Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth* at the 134th IPU Assembly in Zambia. The IPU Member Parliaments highlighted the indispensable role of young people as key agents to re-energize parliaments and political institutions so that they adapt to the modern world.<sup>7</sup> In addition to echoing proposed measures to enhance participation of youth in parliaments, Member Parliaments also underlined the role of youth in upgrading the functioning of parliaments through new technologies.

Member Parliaments also called for change within the IPU’s functioning itself so that young MPs were better represented in country delegations and took on more senior roles within the Organization’s political structures. In 2018, the IPU adopted changes to its Statutes to enhance the number and role of young MPs at IPU Assemblies. To attain a target of having young MPs make up a minimum of 25 per cent of parliamentary delegates at Assemblies, a set of incentives were instituted to encourage greater inclusion of young men and women MPs. The President of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians now holds an *ex officio* seat on the IPU Executive Committee as well as all the Standing Committee bureaux.

The IPU has engaged in many other initiatives to empower youth, including hosting yearly conferences of young parliamentarians, conducting research on youth participation in parliaments, facilitating participation of young MPs at international events, and organizing capacity-building trainings.

<sup>5</sup> For more on this topic see: IPU, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> IPU resolution, *Youth participation in the democratic process* (122nd IPU Assembly, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> IPU outcome document of the General Debate, *Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth* (2016).

### IPU in action

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Creation of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians</li> <li>✓ Global and regional conferences of young parliamentarians</li> <li>✓ Research and data collection on youth participation in parliaments</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Participation of young MPs at international events</li> <li>✓ Youth enhancements to the IPU Statutes</li> <li>✓ Technical assistance and capacity building</li> </ul> |
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### Stepping it up: Launching the next chapter to empower youth

The Declaration adopted by the IPU's Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2015 stated that: "Participation in political life and public decision-making is an entitlement and is crucial to development. When people are left voiceless or excluded, their well-being is undermined, and democracy is left wanting." The Speakers of parliament pledged to do their "utmost to make politics genuinely open to young people and to facilitate their election to parliament in greater numbers".

Five years later, young men and women continue to be left behind in political life and public decision-making.

It has been ten years since the IPU adopted its resolution *Youth participation in the democratic process*. The year 2020 marks an anniversary to celebrate the progress made since 2010, but also to trigger renewed political will and commitment to full implementation of the resolution.

Coinciding with this anniversary, the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament is an opportunity to walk the talk of the 2010 resolution. It is also an occasion to ensure that youth perspectives are included in the Conference discussions and that young MPs and youth take part in the proceedings. Finally, it is a milestone moment to mobilize parliamentarians and the international community to take bold steps for greater youth participation in institutions of political representation, particularly parliament.

**The Conference will provide a platform for parliamentary leaders, both collectively and individually, to affirm their commitment to empower youth and to consolidate support for action.**

Informed by the IPU's research and deliberations, members of parliament are encouraged to initiate and support concrete measures to push youth participation to the next level, including to:

- Implement by 2035, the global targets for youth participation in national parliaments set by the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians based on youth proportions in the global population:
  - 15 per cent of young parliamentarians under 30
  - 35 per cent of young parliamentarians under 40
  - 45 per cent of young parliamentarians under 45

Acknowledging the specific challenges that young women face in entering politics and parliament, each target provides for gender parity of 50 per cent young women and 50 per cent young men.

- Governments and parliaments should pursue institutional reforms to correct the democracy deficit of youth representation. Parliaments should also make it a priority to address the double discrimination young women suffer.
- Propose deliberate measures to reach the targets for youth participation in national parliaments, including by reforming constitutions and electoral laws to introduce youth quotas and removing legal barriers for young people to engage in politics by aligning the minimum age of eligibility for political office with the voting age.
- Support and promote the realization of the IPU young MPs' motto "**If you are old enough to vote, you are not too young to run**", including by joining and supporting the #NotTooYoungToRun global campaign.
- Empower young parliamentarians already in office by providing them with training and mentorship programmes and positioning them to take up leadership roles in parliament.
- Establish parliamentary specialized bodies, such as youth committees or forums of young parliamentarians, to mainstream youth issues in parliament's work and provide youth perspectives to issues that affect them.

- Open up parliamentary processes to youth in society to ensure they contribute to parliamentary work throughout the policy and law-making cycles: from design to monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, encourage parliaments and their members – younger or older – to reach out to youth in their spaces, for example, on social media, in schools, universities and public spaces. The practice of establishing constituency-level youth advisory councils for individual MPs is one way to strengthen this link.
- An increasing number of parliaments are creating “youth parliaments” composed of youth representatives who debate policy and legislation, question government members and take initiatives. The key aim of these parliaments is to give young people a chance to get a feel for the job of a member of parliament. Parliaments should ensure that continuous support and mentoring is provided to young people who participate in youth parliaments.
- Promote the use of modern technologies to more closely connect youth with parliamentary processes, including through innovations such as online petitions, virtual hearings and submissions, and online interactions and voting.
- Invest in modern technologies, particularly social media, to involve young people in politics. Unprecedented access to information and technologies is providing youth with new means to express their aspirations and concerns more freely and to connect with others to debate the problems that concern them.
- Invest in and implement democracy education programmes to educate children and young people and kindle their interest in the democratic process.
- Open up political parties to youth, including by creating and strengthening youth wings and giving young people leadership positions within decision-making structures in order to increase their reach to younger demographics.
- Invest in youth empowerment more broadly. This includes ensuring accessible, quality education for young men and women, including in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), and supporting youth employment, vocational training, entrepreneurship and financial services, such as youth empowerment banks and micro-financing initiatives.
- Review progress made in implementing national strategies for the advancement of youth, and monitor the strategies’ achievements and the obstacles encountered. Furthermore, parliamentarians are encouraged to learn from good practices in this regard, especially those related to preventing duplication or conflict of competences between various institutions concerned with youth issues. Lastly, they are encouraged to give more space to volunteer-based institutions that represent youth and reflect their interests.
- Underline the role of parliaments in increasing the funds allocated to youth programmes in the general budget, especially those related to enhancing youth participation in political life and their contribution to political decision-making, so that it becomes a budget responsive to the needs and aspirations of youth.
- Expand “political simulation” initiatives that train youth in political practice and promote the participation of indigenous actors by focusing media attention on such initiatives in order to emphasize their importance and encourage young people to engage in them, as well as provide more opportunities for policy actors to share their real-life experiences with youth participants.
- Develop measurable standards and indicators to monitor progress made in enhancing the active participation of youth in political life at all levels and in all areas, such as influencing the political agenda to be more responsive to the needs of youth, measuring the percentage of youth representation within organizational and leadership frameworks in different political institutions and, particularly, measuring the impact of young MPs on political decision-making. This can be done through monitoring the contributions of young MPs in parliamentary debates, and monitoring the effects of their proposals on final policy decisions, notably those that affect youth.

***“The time for talk is over. The time to act is now.”***  
- *Outcome document, Fifth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians (Baku, 2018)*

## Conference Report

### *Making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality: Best practices and parliamentary commitments*

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 as a comprehensive and visionary agenda for achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of human rights for women and girls. The vision of Beijing was reaffirmed in 2015, when States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2020 is a year of taking stock of achievements and challenges for women's human rights and gender equality through the review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +25); the 20-year review of implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; and the five-year milestone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The present report reviews key achievements, persisting and emerging challenges as well as good practices witnessed in recent years in advancing gender equality. It focuses on the key areas of equality of men and women in the law, gender balanced political participation and the elimination of violence against women and girls. The report ends with a series of actions recommended to parliaments and their men and women members to accelerate progress in advancing gender equality, in fulfilling the human rights of and empowering women and girls.

#### **Where are we with elimination of discrimination in the law?**

In September 2015, global leaders endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the supporting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda specifically recognizes the importance of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as a key driver of change towards a more equitable, prosperous and inclusive world. Reflecting this commitment, SDG 5 specifically focuses on promoting gender equality. The first target under SDG 5 calls on States to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, with an indicator to track progress on "[w]hether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex". Agenda 2030 reflects prior commitments that were included in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which both call on member states to remove discriminatory laws against women. Equal rights for women and men are not only the right thing to do but are also good from an economic perspective as reforms and policies that empower women boost economic growth.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, on average, women have just three-fourths of the legal rights afforded to men.<sup>2</sup> Discriminatory laws affect more than 2.5 billion women and girls around the world. Daughters and sons are still treated unequally in more than one in five countries for which data are available; and male and female surviving spouses do not have equal rights to inherit assets from each other in one in five countries. Under the law in 29 countries, women cannot head households in the same way as men.<sup>3</sup> Women may not obtain a divorce on the same legal grounds as men in 45 countries. In 25 countries, women are denied the right to pass their nationality on to their children on an equal basis with men.<sup>4</sup> Eleven constitutions still allow exceptions to provisions on non-discrimination in matters of personal law.

On a more positive note, in the past five years, States have stepped up the reform of legislation, policies and programmes to advance gender equality, in particular in the areas of elimination of violence against women and girls; access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health care; education, training and life-long learning for women and girls and; political participation and representation.<sup>5</sup> In developed regions, more attention has been paid to women's right to work and their rights in the workplace, the issues of unpaid care and domestic work, work-family conciliation, and efforts to change negative social norms and gender stereotypes.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington:2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington: 2018).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR and others, *Gender Discrimination and Childhood Statelessness* (2019).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (2020): E(WIMUN)/CN.6/2020/2.

*Women, Business and the Law* records 62 reforms aimed at improving gender equality in employment and entrepreneurial activity in 40 economies between 2017 and 2019. In this same period, three economies implemented four reforms widening the legal gender gap which shows that progress is not a given and constant. There must be a will and caution to avoid setbacks.

Avoiding setbacks was key in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, as women were on the front line of the pandemic, with 70 per cent of health workers being women. Women also made up the majority of carers in the home and workers in grocery stores and pharmacies. The pandemic and some of the measures to contain it put women's lives and safety at risk. Living in confinement and in times of economic stress increased the risks of sexual exploitation and violence against women. The economic downturn disproportionately affects women as workers who are more likely than men to have lower-paid and less secure jobs.

### **Good practices of recent years**

- 191 constitutions now contain provisions on equality and non-discrimination and 24 include stand-alone provisions on women's rights.
- The World Bank found that, between 2008 and 2017, 274 legal reforms on gender equality had been introduced in 131 countries. In the past 10 years, progress has been most significant in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Three quarters of countries have introduced or strengthened maternity, paternity or parental leave or other types of family leave, recognizing the need to address the disproportionate burden of responsibility placed on women for unpaid care and domestic work.
- Laws and regulations on violence against women and girls facilitated by technology have been strengthened or introduced in more than half the of States in the world. These laws and regulations focus more on tackling sexual harassment while a small yet growing number of States are addressing violence against women in politics.

### **Emerging and persisting challenges**

The rise of extremism and conservatism results in a pushback against women's rights that threatens achievements that have been made, ranging from girls' right to education to women's access to health, and equal rights in society and within the family.

In spite of women's and girls' empowerment opportunities through the digital revolution, challenges related to fairness and inclusion, privacy and autonomy, accountability and transparency have become increasingly apparent, calling for gender-responsive legal reforms to be taken.

The gender pay gap remains a reality worldwide and across sectors. Women are underrepresented in added-value jobs and managerial positions. Women's limited access to property, inheritance and financial services further undermines their autonomy, well-being and economic opportunities. In addition, women's essential contribution to society as carers is most often not remunerated, and they continue to undertake most household chores. The unequal share of responsibilities within families and the lack of State contribution and financed infrastructure to care for children and the elderly are key obstacles to redressing these existing imbalances.

The COVID-19 crisis has put additional pressure on women who are more likely than men to work in the health sector (70% of the health workforce) and to occupy unstable, informal jobs that provide no social security or health coverage, while coping with increased care responsibilities.

In countries with a plural legal system in place, traditional, customary or religious law is being prioritized over civil law. For equality in the law to be delivered for women and girls, civil law should be the norm for all.

### **Are we anywhere close to achieving equal participation of men and women in parliament?**

The IPU report *Women in parliament: 1995–2020* published in March 2020, revealed that a quarter of a century after the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, expectations regarding women's participation in politics have grown in ambition, and that achieving a critical mass of 30 per cent of seats held by women in national parliaments was no longer the objective. A shift in the paradigm towards full equality emerges as the biggest achievement of the past 25 years. But despite progress in the global proportion of women in parliament, only four countries have at least 50 per cent women in their lower or single chambers, and one has over 60 per cent of seats held by women (Rwanda). The global average of women in parliament stands now at 24.9 per cent up from a mere 11.3 per cent in 1995.

Over a 25-year span, most progress in women's representation has been achieved by Rwanda, the United Arab Emirates, Andorra and Bolivia, with +57, +50, +42.7 and + 42.3 percentage points gained between 1995 and 2020, respectively, in their lower or single houses. But a majority of countries still have less than 20 per cent of seats held by women. Some 28.3 per cent of single or lower houses have at least 30 per cent. More than one in ten countries (12.6%) has 40 per cent or more of seats held by women in parliament, and 2.1 per cent of countries have reached parity.

There are countries in all regions except Europe that still have lower or single parliamentary chambers with less than 5 per cent women: three in the Pacific, three in the MENA region, one in the Americas, one in Asia and one in sub-Saharan Africa – nine in total.

Regionally, the Americas saw the greatest increase in women's participation in parliament, with +18.6 percentage points in all chambers combined; Asia recorded the slowest growth rate, having gained only +6.8 points over the past 25 years. In 2020, only the Americas have achieved more than 30 per cent women across all houses. Although Europe is no longer in the lead as a region, the Nordic countries are the only sub-region to have over 40 per cent women parliamentarians.

IPU research shows that gender electoral quotas have been a key determinant of progress in women's participation in parliament. Of the top 20 countries with the largest share of women in parliament in 2020, 16 apply some type of gender quota. Other key factors that help accelerate progress include policies to promote women's recruitment by political parties, strong women's movements, awareness-raising efforts and a more gender-sensitive political culture.

#### *Women in political leadership*

Despite progress in female representation in parliamentary leadership roles, women are still underrepresented among Speakers of parliament. The share of women presiding officers of parliament has nearly doubled between 1995 and 2020, rising from 10.5 per cent to 20.5 per cent. Today, women hold 57 out of 278 presiding officer posts in parliaments or parliamentary chambers in 192 countries.

Comparing progress in women's participation in parliament and government, the joint IPU-UN Women map *Women in Politics: 2020* showed that, as at 1 January 2020, just over 10 per cent of countries in the world were led by a woman. Twenty countries had women Heads of State and Government – up from 19 countries in 2019. It also showed that women accounted for 50 per cent or more ministerial positions in 14 countries, up from 9 in 2019. An additional 16 countries had 40 per cent or more women ministers. Overall, the proportion of women ministers reached 21.3 per cent (7.1 percentage points higher than in 2005, when only 14.2 per cent of ministers were women).

At the IPU level, placing gender equality in politics has been at the core of the political agenda for many decades but, in 130 years of existence, there have been only two women Presidents of the IPU. On a more positive note, women have been occupying between 30 to 50 per cent of seats in the Executive Committee, Standing Committee Bureaux and other decision-making bodies of the organization.

#### **Good practices of recent years**

- Following parliamentary elections in 2019, the greatest strides in women's participation were made in the United Arab Emirates, Dominica and Uzbekistan.
- Before 1995, only two countries – Argentina and Nepal – applied legislated gender quotas. But quotas have spread to all regions of the world in the past 25 years, driving up women's representation in parliaments in the process. Today, elections in 81 countries are held under legislation that provides for gender quotas.
- While in the 1990s gender quotas tended to aim at reaching a critical mass of 30 per cent of parliamentary seats held by women, many are now increasingly aiming at gender parity.
- Two countries have adopted new legal measures in 2019: a presidential decree mandating gender parity in the United Arab Emirates, and a new constitutional provision in Benin providing for the introduction of quotas in the electoral law.
- Also in 2019, in Guinea, the gender quota for candidate lists was revised upwards from 30 per cent to 50 per cent.
- Since 2015, parliaments in four regions have appointed their first female Speaker. Asia tops the list with five such appointments: Nepal (2015), Viet Nam (2016), Philippines (2018), and Indonesia and Kazakhstan (both 2019). Four African countries have appointed a female



Speaker for the first time in their history: Namibia (2015), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi and Togo (2019). In the MENA region, women have secured presiding officer roles for the first time in history in three countries: United Arab Emirates (2015), Syrian Arab Republic (2016) and Bahrain (2018). And in Europe, the General Council of Andorra appointed its first female Speaker in 2019.

### **Are we succeeding in eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG)?**

At least 144 countries have passed laws on domestic violence; 154 countries have laws on sexual harassment; and improvements in legal frameworks were conducted in more than half of the countries of the world. However, women and girls remain subject to different and intersecting forms of violence, mostly perpetrated by men, in a variety of contexts – in times of peace or conflict, or in the wake of conflict – and in diverse spheres: the family, the community, the workplace and broader society. Gender-based violence affects women in all countries and across all socioeconomic groups, locations and education levels.

Recent data shows that:

- More than half of the women intentionally killed worldwide are killed by their partners or family members. This represents more than 50,000 women every year and 137 women every day.
- 17.8 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years who have ever been married or in a union have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. The figure rises to 30 per cent when considering violence by a partner experienced during women's lifetime.
- Less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort. Among women who do, most look to family and friends and less than 10 per cent sought help by appealing to the police.
- 15 million adolescent girls (aged 15 to 19) worldwide have experienced forced sex (forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts) at some point in their life.
- 650 million women and girls in the world today are married before age 18.
- At least 200 million women and girls aged 15 to 49 have undergone female genital mutilation in the 30 countries with representative data on prevalence. In most of these countries, the majority of girls were cut before age five.
- Displaced, migrant and refugee women are at particular risk of gender-based violence, including sexual abuse, transactional sex, forced marriage and trafficking.

Effective change requires both a strong institutional framework and national bodies with the capacity and legitimacy to take action: long-term investment is required to implement laws and policies, comprehensive and coordinated services for women and girls, and tackle gender inequality as the root cause of violence.

### ***Good parliamentary practices supported by the IPU***

In recent years, the IPU provided support to several parliaments in their action to eliminate VAWG:

- Awareness-raising and capacity building activities have triggered parliamentary action in Albania, Azerbaijan, Romania, Tajikistan, and Turkey. In Romania, the Parliament made substantial legislative improvements to the law on preventing and combating domestic violence. Sixty-eight Romanian senators and deputies from all political parties submitted a legislative initiative to amend the Penal Code. The amendment eliminates the possibility for aggressors to be exempt from criminal responsibility when the victims withdraw their complaints.
- Support brought to the caucus of women MPs in Mauritania during the examination of a government bill on gender-based violence and a bill on reproductive health, helped include the prohibition of female genital mutilation (FGM) in both bills. The law on reproductive health was passed with the amendment on FGM as proposed by the caucus of women MPs.
- Training for members of the parliamentary network against violence against women in Mali helped the MPs to carry out outreach missions to raise awareness among the population on ending VAWG, FGM and child marriage.
- In Burkina Faso, a law on all forms of violence against women and girls was drafted with IPU support and adopted in 2015. In 2018, the revision of the country's Criminal Code took into account the provisions of the 2015 law while penalties and sanctions for the various forms of VAWG set out in the Criminal Code and the law on VAWG were harmonized.

### **Emerging challenges**

The United Nations Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has shed light on violence against women in politics and violence facilitated by technology as emerging issues to be addressed.

The persistence of gender stereotypes and negative portrayals of women in the media are a factor contributing to violence against women and girls and gender inequality more broadly. Rapid changes in technology and media are creating new spaces for the perpetration of violence against women and girls.

The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), has shed light on women's experiences of violence and harassment in the world of work. It is important to advance ratification and implementation of the Convention.

The IPU study *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament* provided evidence of the prevalence of gender-based violence in parliament as a workplace. In 2019, the IPU issued guidelines<sup>6</sup> to support action by parliaments to eliminate sexism, harassment and violence against women.

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has become an additional risk factor for gender-based violence against women. Data shows that, since the adoption of confinement measures, there has been an increase in the occurrence of domestic violence. Isolation, stress, disruption of social contacts and reduction of certain services, including health services for survivors of violence, and judicial proceedings, may all lead to further victimization, a sense of impunity and, in some instances, escalation of violence leading to femicide.

### **Special focus on violence against women in parliament**

Two IPU studies, published in 2016 and 2018,<sup>7</sup> provided evidence that sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments were extremely widespread and that they were present to different degrees in every region of the world. Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments are major obstacles to the full contribution of women to political processes and a prejudice to democratic institutions and to democracy itself. The IPU encourages and supports parliaments to implement the *Guidelines* by:

- Adopting a policy to make it perfectly clear that sexism, harassment and VAW are totally illegal, intolerable and unacceptable; clearly stating what remedies are available to MPs and parliamentary staff.
- Carrying out an exhaustive evaluation of the situation, including through surveys.
- Ensuring that those who believe they are victims can have access to assistance and advice services in full confidentiality.
- Putting in place a complaints and investigation mechanism which is confidential, fair and responsive to victims' concerns.
- Introducing and applying disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrators.
- Raising awareness and running training for all persons working in parliament on respect at work and the fight against sexism, harassment and VAW.

### **Parliamentary commitments to making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality**

2020 is a crucial year for reviving commitments, deepening engagement and accelerating action to fulfil women's rights both de jure and de facto, achieve equality between men and women at all levels and in all sectors, and deliver on development promises for all, both nationally and globally.

Accelerated global and national action to advance gender equality, fulfil the human rights of women and girls and empower them is needed now. With this objective, the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament needs to place gender equality high on its agenda. The Conference can revive the commitment by parliaments and their members and spur accelerated action to:

<sup>6</sup> IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament* (2019).

<sup>7</sup> IPU, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians* (2016): [https://agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/en\\_issues\\_brief-women-23nov.pdf](https://agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/en_issues_brief-women-23nov.pdf); IPU-PACE, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe* (2018): <https://ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>.

- Reaffirm – in the spirit of multilateralism – global commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 and Sustainable Development Goal 5, as well as IPU commitments on women’s political empowerment<sup>8</sup> and financial inclusion.<sup>9</sup>
- Review implementation of these commitments and accelerate action towards their fulfilment in the context of the SDG Decade of Action.
- Build or enhance political will to support women’s rights and gender equality, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its parliamentary response.
- Track de jure inequalities and repeal discrimination against women and girls in legislation.
- Tackle all forms of violence against women and girls through legislation and policymaking.
- Ensure that all parliamentary action in legislation, oversight and representation take into account and is responsive to the needs and interests of the most marginalized groups of women and girls.
- Adopt ambitious, well-designed and strictly enforceable legal measures such as gender electoral quotas to advance women’s equal participation with men in parliament and other political decision-making positions, including if necessary through constitutional reforms.
- Encourage gender parity commitments by political parties.
- Review and adopt comprehensive legislation and policies on all forms of VAWG, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, that include provisions on prevention, protection and support for the survivors and prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators.
- Ensure strong implementation of such legislation and policies, including by scrutinizing budgets, effective oversight, and by participating in monitoring and evaluation processes together with civil society organizations and governments.
- Oversee government action to ensure proper enforcement of all gender-equality-related laws and policies.
- Allocate sufficient resources nationally and through official development assistance to advance gender equality.
- Build partnerships between men and women parliamentarians and with stakeholders from government, civil society, academia, the media and the private sector.
- Condemn all forms of violence against women in politics and enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards any act of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.
- Raise awareness on zero tolerance against VAWG and contribute to transforming mentalities and challenging the unbalanced power relations between men and women, addressing stereotypes and discrimination, and building a culture of equality and respect.
- Promote personal commitment by political leaders to concrete action for gender equality, the rights of all women and girls and their empowerment.
- Ensure that parliamentary institutions are gender-sensitive, that is, that they are able to respond to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, methods and work, and that they promote women’s leadership.

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution entitled *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective*, adopted unanimously by the 135th IPU Assembly (Geneva, October 2016). <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/135/item4.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Resolution entitled *Promoting enhanced international cooperation on the SDGs, in particular on the financial inclusion of women as a driver of development*, adopted unanimously by the 136th IPU Assembly (Dhaka, April 2017): <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/136/item5.pdf>.

# Conference Report

## *Democracy and the changing role of parliament in the twenty-first century*

### Introduction

Parliament's fundamental role is enshrined in the constitution of almost all countries. In practically every context, it is based on the core functions of representation, law-making, holding government to account, and the budget cycle. These universal core functions have evolved over centuries with the historical development of parliaments. Yet, parliament's role cannot be understood through this lens alone.

Society changes; technological evolutions generate far-reaching modifications in the world of work and the individual's place in society; the machinery of government is becoming more complex; the new challenges arising before the international community are causing new forms of international cooperation to emerge.

Today's parliaments are, in many ways, based on the model that was often codified in the nineteenth century. However, this model is not set in stone; it has been evolving. As the institution most responsive to the will of the people, parliament changes constantly, in both its societal functions and the ways in which it carries out its mandate.

Parliaments are increasingly taking on some roles that, historically speaking, had not been within their realm. For example, they are interacting with the public, informing and educating, or are playing a role in the international political arena much more intensively than before.

This report identifies some of the changes in parliament's role in democracy – changes that have taken place, are underway, or may yet occur. It is intended as a background paper to the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

### Parliaments and democracy

Democracy is still by far the preferred form of government in all continents,<sup>1</sup> and is the basis for good governance. The principles of democracy, as set out in the IPU's 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy<sup>2</sup> were vigorously reaffirmed in 2017 by the IPU at its 137th Assembly in St. Petersburg.<sup>3</sup>

Democracy aims to protect and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, instil social justice, and foster economic and social development. It presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society. As a form of government, democracy is the best way of achieving these objectives; it is also the only political system that has the capacity for self-correction.

In 2006, the IPU identified five core objectives of a democratic parliament: to be representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective at the national and international levels.<sup>4</sup> These objectives were codified almost word-for-word in 2015 in Targets 16.6 and 16.7<sup>5</sup> of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize that effective institutions are essential for achieving progress in all facets of sustainable development.

However, the approach to and practice of democracy sometimes appear to generate disappointment and disillusion. Across the globe, the share of citizens who are dissatisfied with the performance of their democracies is rising – from 47.9 per cent in the mid-1990s to 57.5 per cent in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Only half of

<sup>1</sup> International IDEA, **The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise (Stockholm, 2019)**: <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019>

<sup>2</sup> IPU, *Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997)*: <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/strong-parliaments/setting-standards/universal-declaration-democracy>

<sup>3</sup> IPU resolution, *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy (137th Assembly, 2017)*.

<sup>4</sup> IPU, *Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice (2006)*.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations (2015): <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

<sup>6</sup> R.S. Foa and others, "The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020" (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Centre for the Future of Democracy, 2020): [www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk](http://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk)

the global population surveyed believes their country is currently democratic, ranging from 78 per cent in Switzerland to 20 per cent in Venezuela.<sup>7</sup> In the European Union, a clear majority of citizens agree that their “voice counts in the EU” (56%), yet only one third (34%) trust national parliaments.<sup>8</sup>

In the present age, “when democracies are called on to grapple with forces that often seem beyond their control, affecting their security, their economies, and the livelihoods and well-being of their citizens”,<sup>9</sup> parliaments are expected to address the key reasons for public disillusion in the performance of democracy and public institutions.

The Declaration adopted at the 2015 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament reaffirmed that “Parliament is the central institution of democracy through which the will of the people is expressed”. At the same time, the Conference participants underlined their concern regarding “public scepticism and a disconnect with politics” and stressed the need to enable “the diverse components of society to participate in politics”.

As the world moves into the third decade of the twenty-first century, it is imperative for parliaments to reassert themselves vis-à-vis the global societal changes that constitute a new international reality. Parliaments are being challenged in various areas to find appropriate responses and regain public trust. In a world that is changing faster than ever, affecting people’s lives in so many ways, the role of parliaments is changing too.

Many of these challenging issues have been particularly brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many parliaments are not functioning or are operating in a very limited way, and this is affecting accountability and representation at a critical moment. Some elections have had to be postponed, some courts have only dealt with urgent cases, individual freedoms have been curtailed in many ways and several governments have taken emergency measures in order to slow down the spread of the coronavirus during the pandemic. In times like these, parliament’s oversight role is becoming more important again to make sure that the measures taken against the spread of the coronavirus are being used in a proportionate and time-limited way and do not infringe fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Our citizens call for transparency and accountability and, in order to abide by these principles, it is necessary to strengthen anti-corruption and control efforts and identify the most effective mechanisms to this end.

After the pandemic, it is essential that parliaments work again to defend people’s freedoms and human rights. If democracy was already threatened by a lack of citizen trust, it will now be essential to rebuild the relationship with citizens, without playing on people’s fears, giving more powers to governments or undermining democratic freedoms.

### **Parliaments and the people**

Parliaments play a major role in ensuring the full participation of everyone in public decision-making and political life. The people give members of parliament their mandate. Members of parliament have a duty to engage with their electorate and uphold the trust placed in them.

The gap between representatives and the represented – those who govern and those who are governed – is becoming a widely shared challenge. One of the consequences is the decreasing voter turnout,<sup>10</sup> with significantly lower voter turnout of people aged 25 or under.<sup>11</sup> When voter turnout in parliamentary elections is low, the legitimacy of parliament and its capacity to represent the people and decide on their behalf can be questioned.

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<sup>7</sup> Dalia Research, “Democracy Perception Index 2019: Global State of Democracy” (2019): <https://daliaresearch.com/blog/global-democracy-overview-2019>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, “Spring 2019 Standard Eurobarometer” (August 2019): [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_4969](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4969)

<sup>9</sup> IPU, *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: A guide to good practice* (2006): <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/parliament-and-democracy-in-twenty-first-century-guide-good-practice>

<sup>10</sup> According to the World Bank’s 2017 *World Development Report*, election turnout is declining across the world. Over the last 25 years, the average global voter turnout rate dropped by more than 10 per cent (see in: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2017>).

<sup>11</sup> International IDEA, *Voter Turnout Trends around the World* (Stockholm, 2016): <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voter-turnout-trends-around-the-world.pdf>

A strong democratic parliament should seek to foster a vibrant civil society and to work closely with it in finding solutions to people's problems and needs. A recent study shows that "higher levels of Effective Parliament and Civil Society Participation appear to effectively prevent the start of a backsliding process, make continued backsliding less probable and reduce the scope of backsliding".<sup>12</sup>

There is a strong need for more robust efforts to bring parliament closer to the people, especially to young people and women, which is crucial to achieve a true democracy. Parliaments need to be more open to the public, they need to explain the essential features of democracy and to promote an understanding of democratic decision-making and the legislative process.

Establishing closer links with the scientific community, academia and pioneers of research and innovation can provide parliaments with knowledge and expertise in various areas, which is particularly valuable for parliaments with limited resources.

Fair and inclusive parliamentary procedures are crucial in this endeavour. Fostering an interactive relationship with the public requires parliaments to introduce initiatives which encourage participatory democracy and bolster pluralism.

Such initiatives have to be considered in the light of new digital technologies, which are having a transformative effect on society.

### **Parliaments and the new technology environment**

New information technologies create tremendous opportunities for communication and collaboration between parliaments and the people. Two thirds (66.77%) of humanity have a mobile device.<sup>13</sup> More than 50 per cent of the world's population is now online;<sup>14</sup> roughly one million more people join the internet every day.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, this also means that almost half of the world's population is not online; in the least developed countries only 19 per cent of the population is online. In all regions of the world internet is accessed more by men than women.

Technology empowers people to be more informed than ever before. They demand that their voice be heard and respected and they no longer accept their "pre-digital" era role – to be called on only to vote once every four or five years. They do not want to wait for next parliamentary elections to have a chance to say, once again, what they think and need. People now ask for immediate answers and wish to take part in public decision-making.

Internet influences democracy in multiple ways. The positive impacts include things such as enhanced access to information, new channels for freedom of expression and association, new forms of political participation, a more direct contact between the people and their representatives. The sum of human knowledge is without precedent, and accessible within a few clicks, thus multiplying the possibilities for education.

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged with startling speed in early 2020 has served to underline the essential role of the State in protecting the health of the population, and the equally important role of parliaments in holding the government to account and ensuring that human rights are not undermined during times of crisis. While the arrival of the pandemic created enormous challenges for the functioning of parliament, as of all institutions, parliaments were quick to react. As of 21 April 2020, more than half of the 55 parliaments that had reported data to the IPU declared that they were able to meet, either in person in an adapted format, or remotely.

The speed with which parliaments such as Brazil, Chile, Finland, Maldives, Spain and Ukraine were able to establish remote working solutions was astonishing, and is a testament to the political will to find solutions. It is noteworthy that many parliaments were able to move more quickly to holding remote committee meetings than plenary sittings. However, it should also be noted that some parliaments, especially in poorer countries, are struggling to adhere to the WHO guidelines for social distancing as the adoption of virtual parliaments to facilitate the business of parliament has financial

<sup>12</sup> International IDEA, **The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise (Stockholm, 2019)**: <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019>

<sup>13</sup> Ash Turner, "How Many Smartphones Are in the World?" (Bankmycell, 2019): <https://www.bankmycell.com/blog/how-many-phones-are-in-the-world>

<sup>14</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2019* (Geneva, 2019): <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Simon Kemp, "Digital 2019: Global Digital Overview", (Datareportal, 2019): <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-global-digital-overview>

and capacity implications which may necessitate emergency external funding. Time will tell whether people will expect or demand the new flexibility provided by these online practices to be incorporated into parliaments' regular working methods once the pandemic has been brought under control.

Negative influences are also easy to identify and range from facilitating the spread of misinformation, providing new vectors for hate speech, to weakening of the quality of political debates. In particular, social media encourage and reward opinions that are expressed loudly and strongly such as buzzwords and polemics which capture a wider audience than reasoned debate. As a result, the ability to listen to different points of view is threatened. Polarization grows, and the willingness to seek compromise is reduced. This is damaging for the political process and for democracy in general.

Moreover, democracy as a concept has to be extended to include citizens' right of communication with institutions and governments. During the pandemic, this communication was conducted mainly online. It is now essential to put in place the necessary mechanisms to safeguard and promote this right. As concerns are being raised regarding modern technology, in terms of access and dissemination of information, questions dealing with surveillance, fake news and media regulation must be addressed. At the same time, it is imperative to encourage and implement e-democracy. This pandemic crisis provides an opportunity for parliaments, institutions and governments to modernize their approach to technology.

Specific websites could be created in order to provide citizens with the opportunity to express their opinions and positions on issues that concern society as a whole. Additionally, regular contact could be established with interested parties and groups, via electronic consultation, to discuss specific issues. Parliaments are already taking initiatives in this direction, such as the Parallel Parliament and the "House of the Citizens" projects established by the House of Representatives of Cyprus.

Social media have changed the way people, parliaments and parliamentarians communicate, share ideas and share data. Social networks amplify public demands, in particular those of young people. Parliamentarians at the 2018 World e-Parliament Conference<sup>16</sup> confirmed that social media tools are bringing parliaments and parliamentarians closer to the people, and helping them inform, engage and listen. Yet the same tools also generate adverse effects, such as disinformation, "fake news" and abusive behaviour, which challenge parliaments to find appropriate responses.

### **Parliaments and public engagement**

The times we live in also require the establishment of permanent channels of dialogue and communication with the public. Parliaments need to be more open to the public, they need to explain the essential features of democracy and to promote an understanding of democratic decision-making and legislative processes, using direct communication as well as via the media and other channels.

Parliaments all over the world are becoming more transparent, accessible, and visible institutions. Many parliaments are providing the public with various tools and mechanisms supported by new technologies, such as the parallel parliament in Cyprus, the week of open parliament with a citizen session in Uganda, parliamentary open days, and youth and child parliaments in many countries. Nurturing the culture of transparency and accountability, as well as promoting public engagement, are crucial for gaining the confidence and trust of the electorate.

However, creating real and meaningful links between the people and parliaments requires a strategic approach, with clearly defined goals that would ultimately lead to laws and policies that would be better suited to people and reinforce public trust in parliaments.

To make participatory decision-making possible and effective, different forms of public engagement<sup>17</sup> and citizen participation can be defined. These can be adjusted to different contexts and target groups and provided through different channels and tools. Participative and deliberative democracy should not aim to bypass or undermine parliament and political processes but to strengthen them.

The objective of fostering an interactive relationship with the public points to the need for parliaments to introduce initiatives that encourage participatory democracy and bolster pluralism. Such initiatives can be enhanced by the use of new digital technologies, including blockchain technology, artificial intelligence and other innovative and transformative tools.

<sup>16</sup> IPU, World e-Parliament Conference (2018): <https://www.ipu.org/event/world-e-parliament-conference-2018>

<sup>17</sup> "Public engagement in the work of parliament" will be the theme of the next Global Parliamentary Report. Research for the report is being carried out by the IPU and UNDP in 2020, with a view to publication in 2021.

Public engagement should be inclusive, leaving no one behind. If any group of people is excluded, and does not have the chance to be engaged and participate, the democratic values and outcomes of such process become questionable.

Involving the public is not only about providing different tools and mechanisms for people to get engaged in parliamentary work. It is much more about building a long-lasting relationship between parliaments and people. It is about listening to the public and their concerns and responding to them, by undertaking parliamentary action. A responsive parliament aims to make political processes more inclusive, accountable and participatory.

### **Parliaments and international politics**

Parliaments are, increasingly, making inroads into the international political scene, gaining significant power in the area that was traditionally dominated by the executive.

Parliaments are expected to play a key role in addressing emerging complex foreign policy and international issues that impact every aspect of people's lives, as encompassed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A survey conducted by the IPU in 2019<sup>18</sup> found that over half of the 89 parliaments analysed had established mechanisms within parliaments dedicated to SDG implementation. The survey also showed that many parliaments regularly discussed the SDGs. Others had set aside specific budgets for implementing the SDGs in general or the specific goals, such as education or health. However, oversight of government action and budgetary allocations for delivering on the SDGs were less systematic, although several parliaments had called their governments to account on SDG implementation.

Critical to this direction is an efficient multilateral system based on more solid and mutually agreed rules, as the rule of law and international legality necessitate, with a strong United Nations at its core. Parliaments need to engage and support the initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General and the UN75 – which will encourage people to participate in the biggest global dialogue – and define how enhanced international cooperation can help make the world a better place, including through the achievement of the 17 SDGs. There is a need for IPU committees and working groups to be linked more closely to the United Nations; for stronger linkages between national parliaments and the United Nations; and for parliaments to play an active role in implementing global decisions.

The coronavirus crisis has also shown the importance of solidarity and unity between the countries of the world, and the value of cooperation between nations when responding to a global pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

From one perspective, the role of parliament is constant. Parliament's constitutional mandates to make the law and to hold government to account make it a unique institution with a specific place in a democratic system of government. The principles set out in the Universal Declaration on Democracy – as they relate to the rule of law, human rights, gender equality – should guide the action of all parliaments.

At the same time, the role of parliament continues to evolve in response to changes in society. This role tends to expand; for example, in the ways in which parliaments work increasingly embody the core democratic principles set out by the IPU and the SDGs.

Unexpected events, such as the coronavirus pandemic, pose new challenges for parliaments and democracies around the world. Parliaments in some countries are being marginalized. It is more than ever key for parliaments to be part of the decision-making process, to provide effective oversight and to ensure that the necessary discussions do not destroy the cohesion within their societies. After the crisis subsides, it will be crucial for parliaments to continue to strengthen democracy by reviewing or curtailing emergency measures that were introduced to address the COVID-19 health crisis. Parliamentarians need to understand that people will expect them to address the strong economic needs resulting from the crisis, and it will be essential to develop mechanisms to listen, to integrate people's views into decision-making processes and to design and implement solutions.

In surveying some of the changes that are underway, this paper underlines the fundamental relationship between parliaments and the people which is at the heart of a system of democratic governance, and which has to be constantly nurtured and developed.

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<sup>18</sup> IPU, "Institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in the work of parliaments" (2019): <https://www.ipu.org/file/7639/download>



## Conference Report

### *Science, technology, and ethics: Emerging challenges and urgent solutions*

Basic science, applied research, innovation and advanced technology are all essential to the progress of humankind. They are linked by a virtuous circle: basic science and fundamental research foster our understanding of the world around us and, by doing so, they generate applied research, innovation and technology; these, in turn, directly improve people's quality of life and provide more and more powerful research tools. For example, science, particularly research into infectious diseases, is at the forefront of international efforts to fight COVID-19, and it is now more important than ever that we count on science for the well-being of humanity.

Parliaments, as the representatives of the people, must be able to identify and understand in depth the potential impact of science and technology on society, determining how it can be translated into concrete initiatives for the benefit of the people, and accompanying their implementation with appropriate legislation and political action. Parliaments and policymakers play a key role in ensuring the development of humanity through scientific progress, while protecting their citizens' human rights from the misuse of technological advances.

Currently, these complex tasks are further complicated by phenomena that in the recent past have acquired more and more significance. These include, inter alia:

- The extremely rapid evolution of scientific knowledge and technology in a globalized society, making it extremely difficult for the parliamentary world to follow constantly changing scenarios and to take effective legislative and political action to shape them.
- The temptation, which is more and more common, to use scientific and technological knowledge in a way that privileges economic interests rather than the interests of human beings, including their right to live a decent life.
- The need for society to establish an ethical dimension to scientific research and to the relevant technological applications. This need has historical precedent but has acquired even more importance today following recent developments in fields such as artificial intelligence and genetics.

Moreover, globalization calls for a more coordinated approach among parliaments for solutions to global problems related to the use of science and technology. Sharing knowledge and best practice, including in the parliamentary world, is necessary if society wants to be successful in dealing with extremely complex and challenging issues such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the fight against viral epidemics like the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. This health crisis has shown the importance of global cooperation in science and medicine, and in particular the importance of putting humanity and human well-being at the centre of the work of the scientific community. Only in this way can the world of science – which is global in its nature, and must always be inspired by ethics – help solve major societal problems and bring people together. A lack of solidarity and unethical approaches demonstrated by individual States must be rejected.

Speakers of parliament have a key role in further developing and consolidating the effort initiated a few years ago by the IPU to increase awareness in parliaments of the importance of science and technology for the sustainable development of society, and the importance of integrating them more regularly into parliamentary action.

Speakers of parliament can encourage the members of their parliaments to engage in a challenging cultural change: transforming science and technology into permanent elements of policymaking. Speakers can also directly contribute to this change by reflecting on the most important global issues related to science and technology and by proposing those which should be prioritized by parliaments. The role of science has been gaining more importance in the IPU, with its governing bodies recently approving the establishment of an IPU parliamentary body dedicated to science, technology and ethics, to serve as the global parliamentary focal point on these issues. This working group will be the instrument through which the IPU can start tackling the reflections outlined in this report.

Topics to reflect upon are manifold, and some, such as those related to climate change and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, are already being extensively addressed elsewhere by the parliamentary community. This report has therefore identified five science- and technology-related topics with a high impact on society for the Speakers of parliament to reflect on and possibly bring to the attention of their parliaments.

## **1. Ethics and limits of scientific research**

Scientific research and related technologies can have a strong impact on the development of society and on the welfare of citizens. Intellectual freedom and freedom of research are essential for science to progress. Research is driven by the need to understand the world around us, its inner workings and its deep nature. This process, which implies the constant investigation of unexplored paths, often leads to discoveries and, in some cases, to disruptive innovation. The need for exploration and the will to know cannot be limited.

However, when scientific research operates at the frontier of knowledge or even sets new frontiers, questions may arise as to whether it goes beyond ethical limits. In particular, this is the case for advanced research in biology, genetics and several other medical domains. This kind of research, and the technological progress it drives, can undoubtedly have beneficial impacts for humanity. However, they can also result in situations that go beyond the levels presently accepted by society.

For instance, researchers have developed techniques that allow human DNA to be modified. Such techniques open many doors and raise hopes of the possibility of “repairing” the DNA of patients affected by serious diseases, giving them the possibility to live a normal life. However, these kinds of techniques can also be applied in controversial cases, such as the use by a scientist in 2018 of the gene-editing tool CRISPR to modify the genome of twin babies in order to make them resistant to HIV.

New fast-developing technologies based on artificial intelligence, electronics, robotics, and implant techniques can now “repair” parts of the human body. Some of them are so advanced that they can directly interface with the human brain, change the biology of the body, and make the “replacing parts” more solid, more resistant and higher performing than the replaced parts in a healthy body. The temptation may arise to integrate such technologies in a healthy body, thus reaching a sort of “augmented humanity”, a concept that evidently poses a lot of ethical questions.

What is the role of parliaments in addressing these issues? Scientists and bioethicists agree that a more ethical approach to research can limit the risks related to potential misuse of derived technologies, and that it is crucial to find the right balance between pursuing research for the benefit of society and respecting socially acceptable ethical boundaries. However, establishing boundary conditions and rules and monitoring their proper application cannot be left exclusively in the hands of the scientific community.

Parliaments, as the institutions that represent the peoples of the planet, and hence all human beings, must therefore take the lead by taking well-informed decisions through regular consultation and hearings with independent and non-partisan scientific and technical experts. They must develop legislation which, whilst leaving the necessary space for freedom and autonomy of scientific research, establishes adequate ethical limits in the sole interest of humanity.

An ethical approach to research cannot be fully achieved by adding up national legislations. Science is a universal discipline and the knowledge it produces, together with the technology it generates, spreads beyond borders. Speakers of parliament should not only encourage their parliaments to work on science and ethics, but also promote inter-parliamentary collaboration on these topics, including through and with the IPU.

## **2. Science, technology and ethics in preventing conflicts and dealing with crises**

Scientific progress and advanced technologies are sometimes perceived as direct or contributory causes of conflict, in particular insofar as they are the bases of powerful weapons and other modern military applications such as satellite observation, spying, military intelligence, electronic warfare systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and so on.

It is extremely difficult to establish ethical boundaries to the use of scientific and technological progress in applications that may be regarded as defensive or offensive instruments, depending on the point of view of the parties involved. However, a key factor to determine the nature of the application is the advantage a country (or a group of countries) may draw from the results of specific research programmes.

Military research programmes are secret by nature, as secrecy is the main way to gain advantage in terms of knowledge and know-how that can strengthen countries that invest heavily in these programmes. The lack of competitive military advantage would make it much less worthwhile to invest large amounts of money in these applications.

Secrecy is extraneous to the principles and the foundations of scientific research, in particular basic scientific research, where results are made available to the whole scientific community for validation, thus eliminating any competitive advantage.

Speakers of parliament may wish to promote in their parliaments the culture to support, with suitable legislation and programmes, basic scientific research and inter-parliamentary collaboration on these initiatives. In this way, the knowledge and technology resulting from research programmes can be used to lower the risk of conflict.

Science and technology, if used in the right way, can also be powerful tools to directly prevent conflicts and deal with existing crises. Conflicts and crises are often generated by political interests. Among the justifications for such political interests are deficiencies in people's quality of life (e.g. access to water or decent food; housing problems; access to electricity or sanitation; access to education). Science and technology may help reduce or even eliminate such deficiencies, and hence address some of the drivers of conflict and crisis. Properly harnessing science and technology to deal with crises requires a two-step action plan:

- an honest, and as objective as possible, identification of the drivers of the crisis and of the technology required to eliminate or mitigate those drivers
- the commitment of the parties involved to take concrete action.

Parliaments can promote a cultural change which will lead to science and technology being seen as powerful tools capable of transforming elements of conflict into reasons for co-existence. This includes the positive role science can have in intercultural dialogue and peaceful cooperation. The success of inter-governmental scientific organizations like CERN<sup>1</sup> or SESAME<sup>2</sup> could motivate other sectors – including the parliamentary sector – to adopt the scientific “coopetition” model of collaborating without excluding competition. This requires that all parties identify a common goal, and work towards it, being openly collaborative. In the case of parliaments, the common goal would be to avoid conflict in areas of political tension, and the collaboration would include intercultural dialogue and transboundary projects for the benefit of the local population.

### **3. Ethical use of the internet to prevent human rights violations and social disruption**

As one of science and technology's greatest achievements, the internet has brought great changes and benefits to the lives of people all around the world. The internet allows knowledge and information from all over the world to form a collective intelligence in cyber space, which further creates new value.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of us to stay home, from where we have had to continue our work, education, and interaction via the internet for quite some time. While the pandemic has clearly had an unfortunate impact on our lives, it has also provided us with the opportunity to learn new ways to use the internet and its potential to solve many of the social issues that surround us.

If access to the labour market and to education continues to become easier through the internet, this social change would promote the empowerment of those who have not been able to access such opportunities despite their ability and motivation.

On the other hand, as services based on computers and the internet continue to develop at a rapid pace and become more intricate, the following serious issues have resulted:

- human rights violations, including the surveillance of citizens' behaviour by collecting and using personal data without consent
- abuse of the anonymity of the internet to defame individuals
- social disruption by spreading inaccurate or false information.

These problems represent potential risks to individual privacy, human rights, and social stability. Parliaments are encouraged to continue creating effective legislation and initiatives to ensure that the internet is utilized in accordance with the concepts of freedom and ethics, thus maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks inherent in this powerful and extremely useful tool.

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<sup>1</sup> CERN (European Laboratory for Particle Physics) is an international scientific research institution and inter-governmental organization located in Geneva, Switzerland (<https://home.cern>).

<sup>2</sup> SESAME (Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East) is an international scientific research institution and inter-governmental organization located in Amman, Jordan (<https://www.sesame.org.jo>). Its convention is largely based on that of CERN.

Since the impact of the internet spreads across national borders, parliaments are also encouraged to exchange their knowledge through the IPU and other forms of parliamentary cooperation, to ensure that the legislation and initiatives mentioned above are harmonized across countries.

#### **4. Artificial intelligence: Boundary conditions for ethical development**

Artificial intelligence (AI), one of the main fields of research in computer science, has made spectacular advancements in recent years. Giving machines the capability to “learn” and to develop a human-like “intelligence” leads to a universe of possible applications that will certainly improve people’s well-being.

AI and machine learning already provide innovative solutions to important societal problems and are likely to become more and more present in our lives. Their fields of application range from human health to security, commerce, transportation, and more. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that, in the near future, autonomous vehicles could become the standard mode of transportation.

However, despite these promising expectations, AI also poses a number of sensitive ethical questions, ranging from the concern that intelligent machines could become sorts of humanoids, which could perhaps one day challenge humans, to the consequences that may derive from decisions that humans could delegate to machines. The following examples are just three of the any number of potential scenarios.

- The decisions taken by an autonomous vehicle just before an imminent road accident that cannot be avoided.
- The developments that arise during war when important decisions are made by AI entities.
- Discriminatory actions taken against persons of a specific gender or specific physical features due to AI output made on the basis of incomplete or biased programming.

Leveraging the power of artificial intelligence is key to dealing with some of the major challenges facing humanity, but only an appropriate and ethical development and implementation of AI technologies can avoid risks such as these.

Specifically, it is important to secure adequate testing opportunities in a diverse and inclusive environment during the development and implementation of AI as well as to ensure that unethical decisions resulting from incomplete or biased programming are eliminated.

Parliaments are being required to intervene on these complex and delicate matters, and their intervention should be effective, global and rapid. Our globalized world requires that the legislation needed for an ethical implementation of AI be homogeneous across parliaments and based on common ethical principles. Furthermore, this legislation is needed now, as innovation in this field progresses incredibly fast and society cannot afford for it to develop further without regulation. This becomes critical when we think that, currently, 100 per cent of AI is in the hands of the private sector: big companies have the know-how, train young people, and own the market. Nothing is in the hands of parliaments, which should therefore take back control and ensure that the process of developing AI is not run entirely by private companies, and that the public sector can monitor its development and possibly limit it, if required, for the benefit of the people.

Parliaments need to act swiftly to formulate legislation that oversees an ethical implementation of AI technologies, and at the same time exchange knowledge on AI and its ethical implications with other parliaments and parliamentary assemblies (such as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which discussed AI at its 2019 spring session), in order to reach an adequate level of legislative homogeneity. Parliaments should also take action to increase the benefits of AI for the peoples they represent. Parliaments are encouraged to address important questions such as the following:

- What strategies can be implemented to harness AI development for positive and inclusive societal change?
- Are AI solutions and equitable access to their benefits scalable?
- How can policymakers encourage progress on safe and reliable AI systems?
- How can other key actors contribute to this?

#### **5. The Fourth Industrial Revolution: How to make it inclusive**

Thanks to very rapid and impressive progress in information technology, in recent years society has witnessed a global industrial revolution, known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (or Industry 4.0). This industrial revolution affects many areas of global importance, such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, medicine, robotics, big data, and the internet of things. Artificial intelligence and robotics are gradually replacing humans in many activities, and it is possible that, in the near future, many industrial sectors will be managed by only a few people, seconded by “intelligent” machines.

This major ongoing societal change is undoubtedly favoured by the availability of new and more powerful technologies. However, it is predominantly driven by competitive economic imperatives. The resulting business and social models will significantly change people's everyday lives; the impact is not yet fully understood by society at large.

Replacing workers' existing jobs in many sectors with computational and robotic systems will certainly generate economic gains for industry but will very likely also cause massive disruption in employment, with a major social impact if corrective actions are not taken in time. Furthermore, the creation of new jobs may not be sufficient to balance out this disruption in employment and its impact on society, if not adequately managed. It would be a societal disaster to have an excess of unemployed people with the wrong skills, and a critical shortage of people with the required new skills, in particular in computer science and artificial intelligence.

Governing the innovation brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its impact on society requires a so-called "triple-helix" approach, entailing collaboration and joint planning and implementation actions from the academic, industrial and political sectors. Parliaments have a major role to play in making this "triple-helix" approach a success – securing not only economic benefits for industry, but also benefits for their constituents, and putting in place social protection for those workers who lose their jobs and need to retrain. Legislation and policy should be introduced to fill the gap between the skills youth are learning in the academic sector and the skills required in industry. Parliaments have the vision to bridge this gap. To enhance the utilitarian role of science and technology in our digital age, parliaments are encouraged to engage more actively in embracing science and technology in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in particular by fostering education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) for young people. Despite much research showing that there are no differences in ability between men and women in these fields, the percentage of women who major or specialize in STEM subjects remains low. Achieving gender equality in this area is extremely important for securing diverse human resources as well as ensuring ethics in research and development. Therefore, particularly in countries where women are underrepresented in these fields, policies that promote the elimination of gender bias in each phase of education, research, and employment are needed to help increase the number of women working actively in these fields.

Parliaments are therefore encouraged to engage in constructive dialogue with the academic and industrial worlds, to devise strategies which will translate into effective legislative action. Legislation should favour the deployment of all the innovative potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while ensuring that the price is not paid by the population, in particular the most vulnerable. Parliaments should strive for a certain level of homogeneity among the national legislations brought in to govern the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as a disparate approach would likely disadvantage developing countries.

## Composition of the Preparatory Committee

### **President of the Preparatory Committee**

Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron      President of the IPU

### **Members**

Mr. Slimane Chenine	President	National People's Assembly, Algeria
Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka	President	Nationalrat, Austria
Mr. Haroun Kabadi	President	National Assembly, Chad
Mr. Li Zhanshu	Chairman	Standing Committee of NPC, China
Mr. Demetris Syllouris	President	House of Representatives, Cyprus
Mr. César Litardo	President	National Assembly, Ecuador
Mr. Marzouq Al Ghanim	Speaker	National Assembly, Kuwait
Ms. Laura Rojas Hernández	Speaker	Chamber of Deputies, Mexico
Mr. Tinni Ousseini	Speaker	National Assembly, Niger
Mr. Blas Llano	President	Senate, Paraguay
Ms. Zinaida Greceanîi	President	Parliament, Republic of Moldova
Ms. Maja Gojkovic	Speaker	National Assembly, Serbia
Lord Fakafanua	Speaker	Legislative Assembly, Tonga
Ms. Rebecca Kadaga	Speaker	Parliament of Uganda

### **Representatives of the Executive Committee**

Mr. Juan Pablo Letelier	Chile
Ms. Pikulkeaw Krairiksh	Thailand
Mr. Jacob Francis Mudenda	Zimbabwe

### **Ex-officio Members of the Preparatory Committee**

Ms. Susan Kihika	President	Bureau of Women Parliamentarians
Mr. Melvin Bouva	President	Board of the Forum of Young MPs

### **Representative of the UN Secretary General**

Ms. Tatiana Valovaya      Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva

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Mr. Martin Chungong      Secretary General of the IPU