



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

IGF2020 Parliamentary Roundtable

Opening Speech by Secretary General, Martin Chungong

Mr Under Secretary General,
Distinguished Members of Parliaments,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure for me to open with you today this Parliamentary Roundtable organized on the occasion of the Internet Governance Forum. I am delighted that the Inter-Parliamentary Union is co-hosting this second such roundtable with our valued partners of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I would also like to thank the Parliament of Poland for its support. While we have not been able to meet physically this year in Poland, we very much look forward to hopefully doing so in 2021.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Under Secretary General you have referred to last year's Internet Governance Forum, parliamentarians called for more cooperation between Parliaments and for them to come together in order to exchange best practices for dealing with Internet-related public policy issues. I'm delighted to say that the IPU is able to support this second parliamentary roundtable in order to do just that. I am also delighted that the voice of parliamentarians is now being given a platform at the IGF.

This form of transparent, inclusive and multi-stakeholder discussion on the internet and digital policy is critical for advancing trust in digital technologies and for fostering trust in the work of parliaments.

The IPU is, of course, strongly focused on strengthening parliaments and through our Centre for Innovation in Parliament we, and our participating parliaments, are proud to be able to promote good practice and digital innovation. This role has shone through amidst the pandemic, where our networks have been used to support parliaments and share experiences globally on virtual and hybrid parliaments, enabling our democracies to function in these difficult and challenging times.

Parliaments must play a robust role in our democratic systems and they are not untouched by the world around them. The internet has been a transformative tool for knowledge, information and communication. It has also been a dangerous and destructive tool, fuelling disinformation and conspiracies.

It is up to parliamentarian to take these issues on board and ensure that legislation supports equitable access and digital literacy but also that it protects societies and citizens from harm and attempts to subvert democracy.

As a force for good, the internet is potentially unparalleled but only if we can control the dangerous flow of disinformation. We must, as citizens, be able to trust what we see online, just as we must be able to trust the legislators acting on our behalf.

The internet has done damage to this bond of trust and it is imperative that parliamentarians work pro-actively to rebuild and strengthen trust in democracy as well as to ensure that citizens can feel safe online and trust the information that they find. We must understand how information is spread, how social networks operate and how to counter the negative impacts that range from disinformation to cyber attacks on our public bodies.

I commend the members of parliament here today for being at the forefront of the debate on building trust in this new digital age and I hope that they will respond to the call for actionable outcomes.

I wish you very fruitful deliberations. You can count on the IPU's support to ensure that recommendations made here will be followed by concrete action.