



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Opening ceremony of the Tenth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

Yerevan, Armenia, 12 September 2024

Mr. Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia,
Mr. President of the National Assembly of Armenia,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Mr. President of the IPU Board of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians,

Dear young parliamentarians,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to address you today at the Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, for the first time as IPU President. It is a pleasure to be welcomed so graciously in this beautiful city of Yerevan, where ancient history and modern aspirations intertwine. It is only fitting that we are marking the 10-year anniversary of this important Conference in one of the world's oldest nations, which also boasts the world's highest proportion of young parliamentarians!

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the National Assembly of Armenia for providing such an outstanding setting for this Conference. Armenia is not only leading by example on youth empowerment, but also on its hospitality and its commitment to fostering dialogue among nations.

Over the years, the Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians has become a unique platform for young parliamentarians to make one particular message heard loud and clear: that there is no democracy without inclusion, and there is no inclusion without the participation of young men and women! And I'm so pleased to now be a part of this Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, as we gather in this esteemed hall, we find ourselves at a moment that demands our full attention, our collective wisdom, and our unwavering resolve. The world is beset by conflicts that threaten to undo decades of hard-won progress in education, employment and equality. On every continent, young people continue to endure the most profound hardships: whether it is in Africa, where young people are taking to the streets to demand a better standard of living, or in Asia, where only last month a government was toppled.

Especially in these tumultuous times, the voices and needs of young people must not be ignored. As leaders and parliamentarians, it is our duty to ensure that no generation is overlooked.

Over the next two days, we will discuss the importance of education and employment. As a former professor, this is a topic that is close to my heart.

Let me be clear: education and employment are not mere privileges; they are fundamental rights and the cornerstones of stable and prosperous societies. They empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities, to innovate, and to lead. In times of crisis, they become even more critical, providing the resilience needed to prevent societies from descending into chaos.

Yet, today, education and employment are crumbling under the weight of conflicts, natural disasters and economic upheavals. Millions are being displaced, stripped of their right to learn and work, and jeopardizing their futures and the stability of our societies. If we allow a generation to be lost, we face a future marred by deepening inequality and widespread disillusionment. The cost is not just human potential wasted, but entire communities and nations weakened.

Education and employment give hope. Without them, young people may drift in the shadows and the seeds of despair can take root, threatening to unravel the very fabric of our societies. This is why the urgency of our mission has never been clearer. We need to bring education and employment back to the centre of our politics. We must double down.

- It is high time that access to education for all is guaranteed and delivered. This includes free and compulsory education for those in crisis situations, supported by flexible curricula, language programmes, and teacher training.
- As more people are on the move, we also need to ensure that they can be productive workers in new environments. This requires greater investment in job assessment and placement services, language assistance, and the recognition of skills for new-comers.

But above all, if we are to craft laws and policies for young people, we need young people at the heart of designing these initiatives. To echo the words of the IPU's young Members of Parliaments, no decisions should be made about youth, without youth!

So how are we faring? Aside from success stories like Armenia, we have much work to do. Only 2.8% of MPs are under the age of 30, despite half the world's population being in this age group.

Parliaments are not just legislative bodies. They are platforms for change. And to embody this change, they must reflect the people they serve. The more voices there are, the better our policies become. This is not just a moral imperative; it is the surest path to delivering to the people.

We see this with youth in politics. And we also see this with another group – women.

We know from IPU research that women MPs tend to prioritize social welfare in their work and that this has a positive impact for policies on education and labour. When more women are in the political sphere, these areas receive increased attention, and societies prosper.

Yet women's leadership and political participation remain insufficient. Less than 27% of the world's MPs are women. And when it comes to young women, the situation is even worse: only 1.4% of MPs are women under 30. This represents millions of voices unable to provide the solutions we need on education and employment.

Of course, the same can be said for many other groups that face underrepresentation, marginalization and even discrimination. People with disabilities, and the impoverished, minorities and many more. We must tear down the structural and legal barriers they face – not only to protect their rights, but also because we need each and every one of us to contribute to better political decisions

Dear colleagues,

To enhance education and employment with all these rich perspectives, we need to:

- Adapt education and employment support services to meet the needs of all segments of society, genders and abilities. Education is the seed from which our leaders grow.
- Secondly, design institutional reforms so our parliaments are accessible to all. This can include quotas, fair campaign financing, and supporting new aspirants in political parties.
- Reform discriminatory laws wherever they exist. It makes no sense that one can be old enough to vote or serve in the army, but not old enough to run for office!
- Harness diverse voices in between elections, through citizen outreach and parliamentary channels like committees and caucuses.

Only when inclusion becomes reality can we have education and employment that meet the needs of all. Only then can we transform lost generations into generations of opportunity and rekindle the flame of hope.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Speaking from one generation to the next, please know that we are committed to working with you towards this shared vision. In partnership, let's ensure that no generation is lost, that education and employment are preserved, and that young people are empowered to lead.

I thank you for listening.