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For democracy. For everyone.

**130**  
years of  
empowering  
parliamentarians

# Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

## Sun Valley Forum Transforming Leadership for the Future We Want

Ketchum, USA, 23 July 2019

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here at the Sun Valley Forum, and privileged to have the chance to address such an inspiring and energizing group of people. I am thrilled to see so many young people, activists, members of civil society, and representatives of philanthropic foundations here to discuss leadership for the future we want. For those of you who are not familiar with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, let me straightaway say it has nothing to do with a trade union. It is the global organisation of national parliaments or legislatures working to mobilise these legislature in support of efforts to address global challenges.

At the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the IPU, we aspire to assuming a key responsibility when it comes to leadership for the planet and for our future.

This was already the premise when the IPU was founded 130 years ago, in 1889, by two visionary leaders for the time – French MP Frédéric Passy and British MP William Randall Cremer – when they first rallied parliamentarians from nine countries to find peaceful, diplomatic solutions to the conflicts and the global issues of the day. And so the IPU was born, the first multilateral political organization in the world, predating the League of Nations and the United Nations.

Today, that founding spirit remains as relevant as it was 130 years ago. No country can go it alone when faced with global issues such as the climate emergency, migration or social and economic inequality – the type of global issues that we all here to address.

Today, the IPU continues to work for peace, democracy, human rights and multilateralism, as well as for effective and inclusive parliaments that reflect and represent, in equal measure, women, young people, indigenous peoples and other segments of society. The IPU represents the voice of parliaments at the United Nations and in many of its global processes.

Today, our members are made up of nearly all the national parliaments and the 46,000 parliamentarians around the world.

## **Role of parliaments**

These are the people who pass the laws, vote the budgets, and hold our governments to account to ensure we are going in the right direction, in other words, set the world on a more sustainable course. These are the people you elect, who lead us, who represent us, the people who are shaping our future – **and it is the job of the IPU to see to it that they are truly representative and inclusive, to provide the right leadership for the future we want.**

## **Challenges:**

I have been asked today to address the issue of transforming leadership for the future we want. As I do so, I would like for us to reflect on what we mean by 'WE'. In my view, the 'WE' here is not the leaders. It is rather the people in their generality. I would therefore like to rephrase the proposition and say 'transforming leadership for the future the people want'. Leadership should be at the service of the people, it should be informed by the aspirations of the people, it should articulate these aspirations into a vision for a better future for the people.

When we talk of transforming leadership, today, you will allow me to use my experience in working with parliaments/legislatures and set out how I see these institutions of leadership transforming into effective instruments in the service of the people. In doing so, I dare say that legislatures around the world face a number of formidable challenges: there is low public trust in these institutions, indeed they consistently rank low in popularity ratings. This is because people perceive them as not serving them, they see them as a group of self-serving and corrupt individuals, who are more focussed on their individual interests than on the common good. The popular perception of parliaments is the one often portrayed on TV of squabbling politicians, often engaging in fist-fights or throwing objects at one another. New forms of popular expression are emerging fuelled in large part by the development of new communications technologies and the social media. Civil society organizations are also making inroads into the political space. Parliaments are thus facing huge challenges in terms of their traditional role of serving as conduits for the people's interests and concerns.

While I know for sure that parliaments world-wide are striving to live up to expectations, are doing very good work to address the concerns of citizens, we cannot afford to be complacent. Parliaments are therefore challenged to transform into evermore effective institutions of democracy and governance that deliver effectively on the expectations of the people.

That is the angle of my address today.

Today, a number of criteria have been identified and universally endorsed as being the hallmarks of strong, democratic and effective parliaments: representativeness, transparency, accountability and accessibility

Much of our work at the IPU is therefore about encouraging parliaments to be as inclusive as possible to represent all of us. This work is made all the more critical by the current crisis, when we see growing distrust in political leadership and our democratic institutions around the world.

As I have said earlier, politicians and parliamentarians are too often seen as out of touch, elitist, and disconnected from the people they are supposed to represent. As a result, the electorate is either disengaging with politics or gravitating towards extreme

positions, often represented by telegenic strongmen or populists who purport to offer simple solutions to complex problems.

Why is this? What feeds this crisis in leadership and politics? And what can we do to reverse the trend and rebuild trust in our politicians?

**I offer that there is a clear correlation between representation and trust in democracy.** If the executive or legislative bodies do not reflect the diversity of the people, that's where we see the cracks beginning to form in our democratic institutions.

**Parliaments must represent and act on behalf of all people, regardless of their differences – of gender, age, social status, wealth, ethnicity or other –** to make sure that laws conform to commitments taken, and that they pursue the common good.

Unfortunately there is still a long way to go for parliaments to be fully representative of the people.

When some groups are under-represented it means others are over-represented, distorting the decision-making process.

Today, there is a huge under-representation of women and youth, compared to the general population. Let's take gender equality, for example. Fewer than one in four parliamentarians is a woman.

However, we have come a long way – from 11 per cent of women MPs in 1995 to 24 per cent today. One region in the world – the Americas – has hit the 30 per cent mark, considered to be the critical mass for changing women's representation in parliament. The gains in Latin America have been particularly marked, largely thanks to a growing trend to put in place well-designed quotas.

Recent elections in the United States of America also saw an unprecedented increase in female legislators, with 23 per cent in the House of Representatives and 25 per cent in the Senate, thus bringing the United States in line with the global average.

But, there is still so much to be done. In my view gender equality means gender parity. We must reach 50 per cent if women and men are to have an equal say on decisions that shape our future. I am looking forward to the session that Amanda Ellis will be hosting later today on women's leadership.

There is ample evidence that gender equality in leadership leads to better decision-making. But beyond the percentages, institutions must also become models of gender sensitivity. Laws, policies and budgets need to be analysed through a gender lens to redress the skewed decision-making of the past and benefit society as a whole.

Getting more women into parliament and politics in general is proven to reduce inequalities in society and bring gender equality considerations to the fore. IPU research shows that women parliamentarians prioritize issues such as social welfare, child rights and combatting gender-based violence.

Women MPs work better across party lines in very politically divisive contexts. Women MPs place the people's concerns before political-party concerns. And when more women lead, countries tend to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Ladies and gentlemen, the **leadership for the future we want must be gender equal.**

In a similar vein, let's take youth representation. Half the world's population is under 30 but only 2 per cent of MPs are under 30. Without a doubt, there is a huge deficit in the political representation of youth worldwide today. Young people are critical to the survival and success of democratic institutions and processes and therefore to sustainability. Not only is it their right to take part in political decision-making, but we need their ideas and perspectives to find solutions. Indeed, we need them to step up to leadership roles.

Look at the climate emergency, for example, and the power of schoolchildren or young people, striking or demonstrating every week, to force older generations to take action to save the planet. But we'll come back to that.

Enhancing youth participation makes for better policymaking. Young people are also disproportionately affected by policies on education, employment, housing, gun control, health and reproductive rights, new technologies, among others. Legislation and policies that include a youth perspective are more adapted to reality and more effective and are a boost to the sustainability effort.

At a time when youth are largely alienated from formal politics, electing more young people to office may help restore trust in democratic institutions and cultivate the leadership and the better future we are all looking for.

The IPU started its youth programme in 2010. We began to urge parliaments to focus more on youth. We set up an international framework for youth participation in democracy and a Forum of Young Parliamentarians that meets twice a year. We collect data on youth in parliament to fuel reflection and promote greater youth participation in democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, **the leadership for the future we want must empower youth.**

Every young generation has its own fears for the future – be it the threat of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War, the draft in this country during the Vietnam War, or the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s and 90s.

But today's youth, so-called millennials, have their own particular worry of course – the climate emergency.

Time is running out to save the planet. According to the report released by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in December, we only have a dozen years or so to make real changes to our environment if we are to roll back inevitable climate-change-related catastrophes.

And even while that 12-year window remains open, the planet will be engulfed by extreme heat, drought, floods leading to mass migration, poverty and probably death for millions.

Parliaments and the IPU are challenged to be more robust in accelerating action and providing parliamentary leadership to address climate change and work towards the other goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world's blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

Parliaments are the local entry point for global agreements, such as the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and more generally for implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals designed to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequality, spur economic growth and preserve our planet. There is no gainsaying that parliaments are instrumental in domesticating global commitments.

Indeed, what can parliaments do when it comes to translating international commitments such as the Paris Agreement into national realities? How can they ensure the follow-through from the global to the local?

Firstly, parliaments pass laws that can alleviate and help us adapt to climate change.

We have seen a massive increase in national climate-related laws over the past two decades. Indeed the IPU has contributed to efforts aimed at tracking such legislation. There are around 1,200 climate-change laws and policies today – a twenty-fold increase compared with 1997, when there were just 60. These laws set out countries' commitments to move to renewable energy, adopt carbon targets, ban single-use plastics, and put in place disaster-risk-reduction measures. These issues are high on the agenda of this Forum.

Secondly, parliaments hold their governments to account on international commitments by scrutinizing policies and actions, identifying gaps and demanding answers when the executive is not delivering. I wish here to underscore the critical role parliaments also have in each country's budget process, as they approve the government's annual budget and ensure adequate allocation and mobilization of resources.

And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, as representatives of the people, parliamentarians must ensure that people's real needs are reflected in government action and in international commitments. Parliamentarians have an important advocacy mission in their communities. They are the bridge between the people and the government. They must ensure that local issues are reflected in the global agenda, and that national concerns are taken into account in international commitments and vice versa.

A good example is the trailblazing influence of a state legislature in this country – Hawaii. The Hawaii legislature has passed legislation to encourage accelerated transition to cleaner, greener and sustainable energy including by working in partnership with electricity companies and civil society. The IPU is keen to promote this business model worldwide, by encouraging parliaments to urge their governments to put in place roadmaps for speedy transition to cleaner energies.

To conclude, we believe that if parliaments and parliamentarians truly represent the people, reflect and address their needs and work for the common good, then we will be able to restore faith in our institutions of democracy and build a brighter future, a future the people want.

It is high time we refocused on making democracy, and the institutions thereof, work for the people.

**Ladies and gentlemen, the leadership for the future we want must empower parliaments. Parliaments must empower themselves. It is within their capacity to do this in the context of the prerogatives they enjoy on account of constitutional provisions. Empowerment includes harnessing new technologies and using these to adopt innovative approaches to engaging with citizens in**

**order to better gauge their aspirations and better address them through legislation, oversight of government and allocation of resources. In this way, parliaments are challenged to be relevant, and to be seen to be relevant, to the 21st century and its challenges.**