



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Activities Report of the IPU Presidency

An accountability exercise to evaluate
the first half of the 2017-2020 mandate



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Dear colleagues,

After 130 years of existence, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has become not only the main organization of parliamentarians in the world, but also an institution that stands in solidarity with the hopes and endeavours of humanity. In this way, through the IPU, parliamentarians feel united in a common mission as they face new and formidable challenges.

One of the most important challenges that we as parliamentarians have before us is the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which our Organization has made a great contribution to the fulfilment of its objectives in coordination with the United Nations System. I am quite sure that over 46 thousand parliamentarians can transform the planet if we commit ourselves to it.

I am convinced that the parliamentarian par excellence is one that practices skilfully the art of hope. This type of parliamentarian lives on hope and tries to discern its most subtle signs, even within the darkest realities in which some of our people find themselves. And as long as parliamentarians can transmit hope, the IPU will be an organization that acquires ever greater meaning and strength in the world we live in.

Today, 130 years after our founding, it is very opportune to read again the Statutes of our Organization, where it is stated that "the Inter-Parliamentary Union shall work for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the solid establishment of representative institutions." In this vein, our Organization has endeavoured to become a place where all national parliaments feel at home, developing the common consciousness of being a "family of parliaments". A family of parliaments that is capable of harmonizing the daily life of the people that we have the honorable and delicate task of representing.

This becomes even more necessary at a time when we are experiencing the conspicuous paradox of multilateral consensus, which is suffering more and more from a severe crisis. The crisis has arisen due to the subordination of some realities to the decisions of a few, while the world's problems are urgently demanding more and more joint interventions from the entire international community.

Certainly, the main challenges we face, be they issues of security, development, environmental protection, or women's empowerment, require that all parliamentarians can act together and demonstrate our availability to promote the solidarity towards achieving true integral development.

In the context of an ever growing globalized world, it is necessary to recognize the superior role that parliaments and the IPU play in contributing, as our Statutes state, to the "defence and promotion of human rights, which are universal in scope and respect for which is an essential factor of parliamentary democracy and development".

The Presidency of the IPU has, with effort and determination, dedicated itself to pushing forward this very distinguished task and seeks to reflect that, with transparency, sensitivity and professionalism, in the pages that you will find below.

Gabriela Cuevas, IPU President

1. Halfway through: The Presidency in terms of its commitments

IPU at the service of parliamentarians

My first commitment was and always will be to **be close to my parliamentary colleagues** and work hand in hand with national parliaments. For this purpose I made **46 visits to 24 countries**: Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bolivia, Canada, Egypt, Germany, India, Israel, Kuwait, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Viet Nam. In the summer, I hope to be able to visit Africa, Europe and my beloved region, Latin America and the Caribbean. I want to thank the support of the many parliaments that have hosted me in their countries, from whom I have learned about their legislation, policies and culture. However, most importantly, I want to thank them for allowing me get to know the hearts of their peoples.

Being close to parliaments has been possible as a result of considerable efforts. Due to the strict budget austerity policy Mexico is prioritizing, my working tours have not been funded through public resources. Regarding my travel expenses, I want to share with you in **full transparency** that official IPU meetings (Assemblies, the Annual Parliamentary Hearing and the Conference of the Parties) are funded by the IPU and that for extra events I receive an honorarium of CHF 30,000 per year. However, to attend the invitations of our Members and other international organizations, and even to cover the UN agenda itself, I must pay many trips with my own resources. All of this is duly reported in my publications on social networks to offer maximum transparency and avoid conflicts of interest.

This last year and a half, apart from putting in a great deal of effort to go on these visits, I have sought to approach parliamentarians in our gatherings. I have tried to personally meet with as many fellow parliamentarians and IPU associates as time has allowed in order to establish closer and more efficient working relations.

As parliamentarians are the heart of the work of the IPU, strengthening their personal capacities is essential to achieving better results for the Organization, national parliaments and citizens. In this vein, I committed myself to **implementing capacity building programs** for parliamentarians and their work teams. So far, I have dedicated myself to pushing forward, endorsing and following up on events to accomplish this goal, but most of all, I have been working constantly towards organizing a new **IPU leadership seminar**. I have been advancing very well on the program, and have made good progress in finding important universities and think tanks, and acquiring funds. However, **I call upon you to work together** to find partnerships with the best Universities of the world and search for

more funds. Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or any other matter.

Another aspect of my commitment with parliamentarians was **defending the gender agenda** and making every effort possible to open more spaces for women. I have addressed and participated in many international summits in this regard, such as the sixty-second and sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62 and CSW63) in New York, the 12th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in Cochabamba, Women for Global Security and Sustainable Development plenary session in Saint Petersburg, the High-Level Steering Group for Every Woman Every Child in New York and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Partner's Forum in 2018 in New Delhi, to name a few. Furthermore, I have held various high-level dialogues with international leaders and of course, have been in close contact with the Forum of Women Parliamentarians of the IPU.

In the last 2 years, the presence of women in parliaments has increased by only 1 per cent. This is indicative that if we want to achieve gender equality, we must make it an objective to be pursued by all of us every day. I am certain that women's empowerment can lead to the development of better and fairer societies. It is a commitment I have made to you and an essential element of the 2030 Agenda.

IPU: useful for national parliaments

The IPU should put its capabilities at the service of institutionalizing the world's parliaments so that they can more effectively develop their responsibility for representation, legislation, budget allocation and control. That is why I have placed great importance on the active participation of parliamentarians in **workshops and seminars** on the implementation of treaties. Some examples of these that have taken place during this year and a half are the workshop organized by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) to advance on the ratification and implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Zero Draft of the Global Compact on Refugees workshop, the workshop for the Chairs of foreign affairs and finance committees and the workshop on financing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, both organized with the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), the Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, the Fake News Workshop, the seminar on UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), workshops on the Self-Assessment Toolkit on SDG strategies and implementation, and the Seminar in Rabat on occasion of the Adoption of the Global

Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Also, we had two annual gatherings on the occasion of the Conference of the Parties (COP), which were very helpful in placing more emphasis on the implementation and financing of the Paris Agreement, and in so doing, providing better perspectives on how to effectively face climate change. Adding a practical component to our IPU Assemblies and inter-parliamentary activities has, undoubtedly, a great potential to foster clear and concrete actions towards implementing our international agreements.

Also, as part of building an IPU that is useful for national parliaments, I committed to finding ways to support Member States in building strong and democratic parliaments. I am a strong advocate of leading by example, and I am glad to see that the IPU has become **a more democratic and transparent institution**. For the first time in the IPU's history – and with the conviction and commitment to democratize and decentralize our Organization's decision-making processes – the composition of the **Preparatory Committee for the 2020 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and the election of the members of the High Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (HLAG)** will no longer be determined by the Presidency and the Secretariat. Instead, this decision will be made together with the Geopolitical Groups, who will be asked to present representation proposals for the HLAG during the upcoming Assembly.

Lastly, guided by the commitment of making the IPU relevant for national parliaments, I have been in close contact with the geopolitical groups, approaching them in every Assembly and keeping track of their activities. **Being close to the diverse geopolitical groups** is essential to integrating an open agenda that reflects the plurality of visions emerging from different national realities around the world.

IPU as an actor in the global agenda

Our Organization has observer status at the United Nations, but this is not enough. I have sought for the parliamentarians of the world to have a more powerful and relevant voice in the United Nations and participate in defining the global agenda. For example, one way in which we advanced our presence at important global events was during the **World Investment Forum (WIF)** which took place from 22 to 26 October 2018. It was the first time that a legislator had participated in this important high-level multi-stakeholder gathering, and also the first time in the ten years that the WIF has been taken place, that the Presidency of the IPU had taken part. Another good example is the Parliamentary Speakers' Summit at the **G-20 (P-20)** held in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 31 October to 2 November 2018.

This was the first time this event was organized by the IPU and we hope this continues to take place every year.

The urgent need to defend multilateralism and the responsibility to adequately implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and international treaties require communication, coordination and joint work between the IPU and the **United Nations**

System. That is why the presence of the IPU in UN events and other multilateral organizations has been intensified and our calendars have been more synchronized. In my capacity as president of the IPU, I have been in closer contact with the Secretary General António Guterres and the two presidents of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák and María Fernanda Espinosa. In addition, I have gathered with other UN officials, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi; the UNCTAD Secretary General, Mukhisa Kituyi; the Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov; the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Patricia Espinosa; the current and past Director Generals of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), António Manuel de Carvalho and William Lacy Swing respectively; and the current and past UN High Commissioners for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet and Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein respectively. Sharing our perspectives and reaffirming face to face the commitment of the IPU to continue cooperating more actively with the United Nations and other international organizations is paramount to increasing our voice in the global agenda.

Another relevant event regarding this commitment was on 22 May 2018 when I participated in the UN General Assembly debate on **Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU** at the UN Headquarters in New York. Following the debate, a resolution on the same topic was adopted with 91 co-sponsors, which in addition to being clearer and more concise than what was achieved in previous occasions, was innovative in three different aspects: 1) it proclaims 30 June as the **International Day of Parliamentarism** starting in 2018; 2) it opens up the possibility for parliamentarians to attend important **coordination meetings at the UN Secretariat** and; 3) it paves the way for **new areas of cooperation**, such as sustaining peace, inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue and countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. This resolution also resulted in an increase in representation and inclusiveness as it also allowed parliamentarians to attend important meetings, as opposed to the previous situation in which only the Secretariat was asked to participate. This was a major achievement for the IPU and for parliaments around the world.

2. Semi-annual report: Let's change the world, let's start from our own communities

The journey we started since you entrusted me with the Presidency of this honourable Organization is now halfway through. I am pleased now to share with you the activities I have carried out as President of the IPU in the last six months, which have been intense but very rewarding work. To all the people in the world that are concerned about the problems we face today as a global community and are seeking greater international cooperation to find solutions to them, allow me to reassert once again that each one of the Members of the IPU are united in finding the best solutions that respond to those challenges. This is our primary objective and it will remain so in the years to come. Before I proceed, I would like to thank you once again, IPU members, colleagues and Secretariat, for the support, hard work, and unwavering effort you all have placed in our Organization, I feel very honoured to head a team with such enthusiastic and committed members.

The challenges the world is facing now concern everybody, and we, as part of the Organization that most closely reflects global public opinion, have the duty to effectively confront them, bringing solutions through dialogue and concrete action. I congratulate the work we have done together and the positive outcomes we have achieved until now, but I am also aware that much more work is still to be done. With this in mind, I am looking forward to another year and a half of being in charge of the IPU Presidency, acknowledging the great responsibility that lies within my hands.

During the **139th IPU Assembly**, I had close conversations with the presidents of the Twelve Plus, Asia Pacific and Eurasia Geopolitical Groups, the presidents of the IPU commissions, and several speakers of parliament and delegates. I can gladly recognize that these working meetings were very productive and encouraged us to keep on working on our pending issues as an Organization. Furthermore, taking into account that from the 750 parliamentarians that comprise the IPU, only 32.4 per cent are women, I did not want to miss the opportunity to also gather and exchange ideas and visions with the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the group that leads our political work redressing the gender imbalance in political representation. Keeping up with the gender agenda is one of my strongest commitments as IPU President, and consequently I will continue to push it forward in the year and a half to come, in close collaboration with men and women who globally foster equitable gender representation.

Immediately after our 139th Assembly, the third semester of activities of the Presidency started. The first of these was in the framework of the **World Investment Forum (WIF)** in Geneva, which took place from 22 to 26 October 2018. Thanks to the invitation made by the **UNCTAD** Secretary General Mukhisa Kituyi, I participated in the inauguration ceremony of the WIF. It was the first time that a legislator has participated in this important high-level multi-stakeholder gathering, and also the first time in the ten years that the WIF has been taking place, that the Presidency of the IPU has taken part.



World Investment Forum 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The first activity held as part of this event was the **workshop for parliamentarians, “Financing the SDGs: How can parliaments bridge the gap?”**, organized by UNCTAD, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and the IPU. The World Investment Report 2014 estimates that the annual investment gap in key SDG sectors in developing countries is an average of 2.5 trillion per year, therefore, the focus of this workshop was on how to reduce this tremendous gap and on how to finance the 2030 Agenda at the country level. National parliaments play a prominent role in that regard, since they have the responsibility to identify reform priorities and draft new legislation that helps to create a favourable SDG environment at the legislative level. To address this purpose, the issues discussed revolved around innovative approaches and key financing means to achieve the SDGs, interaction between parliaments, policy makers and the private sector, oversight of budgeting, investment policies, and other ways to better deliver on sustainable development. During my intervention, it was stressed that the work of legislators is a necessary condition to give certainty and establish an adequate legal framework to pave the way towards the creation of attractive and safe environments for sustainable investment, ensuring economic development, but most of all better living conditions for our societies.

Later, on 25 and 26 October 2018, I had the great pleasure to address the inauguration of the sixth **World Humanitarian Forum** (Baku International Humanitarian Forum) in **Azerbaijan**. This event gathered political, scientific and cultural leaders of the world community whose aim is to hold dialogues, discussions and exchange of views on a wide range of global issues in the interest of all of humanity. On this occasion, it was essential for me to speak in favour of multilateralism, recognizing the big threats it faces nowadays, such as populism, nationalism and misinformation.



IPU President and Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan.

In the framework of this event, I was glad to meet with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, to address the IPU agenda and talk about the upcoming session of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, which aims to allow young parliamentarians to have better problem-solving tools and legislate in favour of the generations to come.

Along with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Elmar Mammadyarov, the Chairman of the National Assembly, Ogtay Asadov, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Valeh Alasgarov, and the Minister of Youth and Sport Azad Rahimov, we talked about all the details pending in the organization of the upcoming Forum.

Later on, on 29 October 2018, the FAO **Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition** took place in Madrid, **Spain**. This was the first meeting of its kind, seeking to advance political will to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) at the international level. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in the past

20 years, the number of people suffering from hunger has fallen significantly. However, this trend has seen a reversal in 2016 as a consequence of climate change and declining economic growth, among other reasons. To exemplify this situation, a total of 821 million people were undernourished in the world in 2017, up from 815 million in 2016. Bearing this in mind, this summit was an opportunity to remind us of the important role that we as members of legislative bodies play in helping our countries achieve hunger-free societies, and in consequence, advance in allowing our people to live with dignity.



IPU President at Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition in Madrid, Spain. ©FAO/Thomas Canet

As President of the IPU, I reported on the work we have already done with the FAO and PMNCH to ideate parliamentary tools to improve legislation on malnutrition, diabetes, obesity, and overweight, among others. These would be useful for national legislators to profit from the experience of the FAO, and consequently, help us implement laws that can most effectively tackle nutrition related problems. Holding close ties with the international community is one of our inherent duties; therefore, being in coordination with UN activities is fundamental to create synergies, achieve our shared goals and make our actions stronger and more meaningful.

Being part of the global community also means being aware of the discussions held in diverse multilateral fora and the agreements achieved within. The G-20 summit is nowadays one of the most relevant multilateral gatherings in the world, and therefore, a high-level dialogue mechanism MPs should be attentive to. Five years ago, we held a P-20 meeting in Mexico that brought together legislators from these 20 economies, which represent 85 per cent of the world’s GDP and two thirds of the global population. Taking this event as an example and under the initiative of



IPU President with parliamentarians Emilio Monzó, Gabriela Michetti and Anthony Gooh, representing Secretary General of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD.

the IPU and the support of **Argentina**, for the first time a parallel summit of **(G-20) P-20** Speakers of Parliament took place ten years after the first G-20 summit was held.

The P-20 Summit reached an agreement in the form of a joint declaration stating that the loss of confidence in democracy has led to the emergence of authoritarian and populist trends in governments. Overall, we acknowledged the fact that the defence of rights and freedoms has vanished in the face of higher insecurity and lower economic growth, which restrains opportunities for new generations. The parliamentarians of the 20 largest economies (except the United States and Australia who could not attend due to election periods) made commitments and adopted the declaration by consensus, which was an important step for global parliamentary diplomacy.

Also, in the framework of the meeting of Parliamentary Presidents of the P-20 countries, I met with Emilio Monzó, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina, Federico Pinedo Provisional President of the Senate, and Gabriela Michetti, Vice President of Argentina, to exchange opinions on public policies, especially to foster the true empowerment of women. I also had the pleasure to meet the President of the Lok Sabha of **India**, Sumitra Mahajan, to talk about the creation of the national parliamentary chapters of the UN agenda Every Woman, Every Child, which is a project aimed at the implementation of maternal, neonatal, infant and adolescent health programs. I also had the opportunity to converse with Ana Pastor Julián, President of the Congress of Deputies of **Spain**, and Maya Alejandra Fernández Allende, the second woman to preside over the Chamber of Deputies of **Chile**, about the gender inclusion agenda and the need to seek tools to generate true female empowerment. Last but not least, in a very productive dialogue with Li Jianguo, Vice-President of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of **China**, we agreed to keep on pushing forward an economic and legislative agenda to defend multilateralism and foster the SDG Agenda.

On 23 November, I visited Spain to take part in several IPU-related work meetings with José Ignacio Echániz, Head of the parliamentary delegation of Spain to the IPU, and with Pío García Escudero and Ana Pastor, Presidents of the Senate and the Congress of Deputies of **Spain**, respectively. The work done together with the Spanish delegation focused on the migration, peace and security agenda, in alignment with and supporting the guidelines in the Global Compact on Migration drafted under the auspices of the United Nations.

Subsequently, the **Regional Seminar on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda** organized by **Israel** for the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group of the IPU and for the parliaments of East Asia was held from November 20 to 22. At the opening of this seminar, I emphasized the need to keep in mind the inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda, the importance of not losing focus on not leaving anyone behind, and the decisive role that parliaments play in defending this agenda and the democratic principles.

On this occasion, I had the pleasure of meeting with the presidents of the parliaments of **Israel**, Yuli Edelstein, and **Cyprus**,



IPU President and Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Michael Oren.

Demetris Syllouris, to speak of the need to give greater visibility and relevance to the IPU as a platform for dialogue among parliaments so as to promote more inclusive and development-oriented policies in the almost 180 countries that are part of our Organization. I was also able to talk with parliamentarians from different political parties in Israel to find out their perspectives and proposals on conflicts in the region to acquire a more comprehensive perspective on this undeniably complex issue.

Later on, it was time to address an issue of a different nature: technology and communication. Organized by the IPU every two years, the **World e-Parliament Conference** 2018 took place from 3 to 5 December 2018, in Geneva, **Switzerland**. Given that today 70 per cent of parliamentarians use social media to communicate and engage with the public, this global gathering is a useful tool to analyse how parliaments are including technology to their activities to build more open, transparent and inclusive institutions.

On this occasion, the President of the Twelve Plus, MP Duarte Pacheco, attended this event in my place. There, he delivered an opening statement on the need to adopt new parliamentary practices that include technological innovations. However, it is also necessary to bear in mind that these innovations do not automatically lead to positive developments for society, which requires us as parliamentarians to work together to make technology work for the good of everyone.

After visiting Israel, I was glad to be present at the **Parliamentary Conference on Migration on the occasion of the Adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**, held in Rabat, **Morocco** from 6 to 7 December. Given that 1 person in 30 is a migrant and taking into account the recent

migratory crisis around the world, it becomes more urgent than ever to give certainty to the global commitments made by our governments. Having a parliamentary backup for the Global Compact endows this agreement with certainty and ensures that the necessary process of implementing and modifying laws in accordance with the Compact will take place.

In that spirit, two intense days of work in Morocco took place, during which, together with parliamentarians from all over the world, we sought ways to implement the Global Compact in our respective countries and to achieve the expected social benefits. For this, I held meetings with the Presidents of the House of Representatives of **Morocco**, Habib El Malki, and the Chamber of Counsellors, Hakim Benchamach, to organize the first parliamentary congress for the implementation of the Global Compact. I also spoke with Dr. Saadeddine Othmani, Head of the Government of Morocco, to exchange views on best public policy practices to generate development conditions.



[IPU President and Dr Saadeddine Othmani, Prime Minister of Morocco.](#)

Just after addressing the topic of migration, one of the most contentious issues that the world faces today, it was time to advance onto another momentous topic: climate change. The IPU together with the Polish Sejm organized a **Parliamentary Meeting** at the **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP24)** that took place on December 9, 2018 in the City of Krakow, **Poland**.



[Gabriela Cuevas presiding Parliamentary Meeting within the framework of the COP24 in Poland.](#)

As the President of the IPU and in alliance with legislators from around the world, we presented a parliamentary guide aiming to help countries to establish better instruments to legislate in compliance with the objectives established in the Paris Agreement. According to the parliamentary guide, among the minimum criteria that all legislation must contain are: 1) Quantifiable results of legislation on this matter, along with clear periods of implementation and a means of ensuring that the executing authorities are clearly identified, and 2) the establishment of fiscal incentives that motivate social and private agents to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases. Overall, this event was helpful in stressing the need to work on legislation that could serve as a formal framework for sound environmental and social policies at the local and regional level so as to protect communities that are most vulnerable to environmental impacts, and create the conditions for a sustainable economic development.

Another topic I had the opportunity to address in the second half of the last year was maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health. Around 3.2 million children and adolescents lost their lives as result of preventable or treatable infectious diseases or injuries in 2017; 43 per cent of children under 5 years old do not enjoy the right conditions for their optimal development, and, between 2005 and 2016, 1 in 5 girls, adolescents and women were victims of physical or sexual violence. With this in mind, on December 12 and 13, I attended **The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Partners' Forum 2018**, held in New Delhi, **India**, and together with the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, we presented substantive policy criteria in favour of the health of women and children.

Furthermore, along with the Prime Minister of India, the Chair of the PMNCH, the Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare of India, the President of the African Youth and Adolescent Network and the Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal, I participated in the inauguration of the Partners' Forum, addressing the role of women in politics, particularly in defending women's and children's rights and the disadvantages still faced by women parliamentarians accessing positions within political bodies. I also stressed the urgent need for law-makers to move from words to actions in the design and approval of laws that guarantee the health of people, and especially, women through public systems with sufficient medical personnel, equipment and supplies of medicines, as well as public policies that encourage prevention.

From the legislative commitments achieved, one of the most sensitive ones seeks to generate better conditions for maternal, neonatal and infant health. Not only because it is a human right, but because of existing inequalities that women face in accessing medical services. We also agreed upon working groups and committees to oversee the implementation of the IPU Resolution of 2012 "Access to health as a basic right: The role of parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children". We hope to develop, through these committees, action plans that identify concrete measures to achieve compliance at the national level, and follow up on the implementation of these commitments with the help of the IPU Advisory Group on Health.



Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, in Baku, Azerbaijan, December 2018.

As planned during the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, 14 December saw the celebration of the **Fifth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians** in Baku, **Azerbaijan**. Today, almost half of the global population is less than 30 years old yet only 1.9 per cent of legislators are in this age group, which suggests a significant problem of under-representation of young people in the world's parliaments. Taking this into account, the Forum sought to encourage parliamentarians to come up with better public policies that promoted real youth empowerment through education, job opportunities, scholarship programs, inclusion of technological resources, among other things. Young parliamentarians are a priority group on my agenda. That is why it is of great importance to continually make an effort to ensure that young people are adequately represented in legislative bodies.

A few days later, on 15 and 16 December, the **Doha Forum** took place in Doha, **Qatar**. This event served as a platform for high-level political dialogue on "Shaping Policy in an Interconnected World" focusing essentially on security, peace and mediation and economic development topics. Whilst there, I seized the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister of **Qatar**, Abdulla Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and with the Speaker of the Shura Council, Ahmad bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud, to discuss the agenda for the 140th Assembly. Together, we made progress in coming up with thematic workshops and seminars that we considered to be most appropriate and helpful for us when bringing proposals for law and public policies to our countries. By then, we had already discussed and planned to have a high-level dialogue table for presidents of parliaments; a workshop on maternal, child and adolescent health; as well as a workshop on legislation to prevent and combat terrorism, among others.

On 22 December I visited Palestine and started activities again on the morning of 24 December, when I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine, Dr. Riad Malki and with the delegation of parliamentarians of the Palestinian Legislative Council to exchange views on the political and human rights situation in the region. We also had a conversation on the diplomatic paths towards peace in the Middle East, where we agreed that taking into account the participation of legislators and the IPU might be helpful in this process.



Prime Minister of Qatar, Abdulla Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas. © Shura Council 2019



Shura Council, Ahmad Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas. © Shura Council 2019

Afterwards, on 26 December I met with the President of the Israeli Knesset, Yuli Edelstein and with the President of the



IPU President Gabriela Cuevas and Yuli Edelstein Knesset President. © Isaac Harari

Foreign Relations Committee, Avi Dichter. Visiting Israel at that time was particularly interesting since the country was in the process of dissolving the Parliament and calling elections for the following year. In this context, where domestic politics are undergoing adjustments, maintaining a good foreign policy becomes even more relevant, which is why, I spoke with Avi Dichter, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the status of human rights in all territories. As for my conversation with President Edelstein, we talked about the work between the IPU and the Knesset, highlighting the IPU as a platform that promotes dialogue in the region, in pursuit of peaceful solutions.

Furthermore, I had the honour of meeting HM King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in **Saudi Arabia** on 8 January. We had a very interesting exchange of views on the role of legislatures in solving social problems, challenges in human rights and global security. In addition, in a meeting with the Chairman of the Advisory Board, Dr. Abdullah Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, we discussed the relationship between Saudi Arabia with the IPU, and the possible areas for further and deeper cooperation.



King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas. © BANDAR ALGALLOUD/SAUDI KINGDOM COUNCIL/HANDOUT/Anadolu Agency

Continuing on my working tour and within the framework of the **Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)** in Abu Dhabi, **United Arab Emirates** from 10 to 17 January, 2019, it was a pleasure to have a very enriching meeting with the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan. It was good to note that the Crown Prince is committed and shares the objectives of the IPU, fostering gender

equality and tolerance in his country through legal reforms and executive actions. We also talked about human rights, the fight against terrorism, global trade and the importance of investments towards generating employment and opportunities. On this same visit, I met Amal Al Qubaisi, President of the Federal National Council and the first female to lead a national assembly in the **United Arab Emirates** and in the region. Undoubtedly, a great example of women's empowerment and women's inclusion in parliament, a goal the IPU strongly pursues.



IPU President with the Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan © Faizan Hashmi/UrduPoint Network

As for my participation in the IRENA Assembly, it was an auspicious opportunity to reflect on the importance of us as parliamentarians committing to pushing forward the renewable energy agenda. The importance of pursuing this objective naturally has to do with climate change but also with social inclusion. Since it has become clear that traditional ways of generating and distributing energy will not be able to provide full and inclusive energy access, renewable energies might be the only way this can happen. It is now necessary to think of effective changes in this area, linking, for the good of our societies, the climate change agenda and the social inclusion agenda, both key to the SDGs. IRENA has proven to be key agent to lead this process.

On 13 January, I visited **Kuwait** and was honoured to meet Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Emir of Kuwait maintains a policy of dialogue and creates bridges of understanding in the region. In addition, his leadership in raising funds to the benefit of refugees has helped millions of people. For this reason, during our meeting we discussed the role the IPU plays in this regard and our responsibility in the global and national humanitarian agenda.

In the framework of my working meetings in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf countries, I also visited **Bahrain** from 16 to 19 January. During that visit it was an honour to meet with HM King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to discuss the importance of tolerance and dialogue to generate a stable international environment. It was also a pleasure to meet the first woman elected as the president of the parliament in the region, Fawzia Abdulla Yusuf Zainal, whose voice in favour of women will always be important for the IPU and be a positive example of gender equality.

With the Chairman of the Advisory Board, Ali Bin Saleh Al Saleh, and my fellow legislators, we discussed the options for greater cooperation between the IPU and Bahrain. I also held working meetings with HRH Princess Sabeeka bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, President of the Supreme Council for Women; the Minister of the Interior, Sheikh Rashid Bin Abdulla Al Khalifa; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa and the President of the National Institute for Human Rights, Maria Khoury.

Moreover, during my visit to the Arabian Peninsula, I was able to conduct important meetings in **Oman** from 20 to 26 January. On this occasion, a very interesting exchange of ideas and legislative proposals took place with the President of the Consultative Council, Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal Al Mawali, and the President of the State Council, Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al-Manthri, as well as with parliamentary colleagues. We talked about options for cooperation between the IPU and Oman and the possibility of carrying out new regional projects. I also met with HM Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister, with whom I had a very productive and interesting exchange of ideas. Oman is a young country that beginning to build its institutions in a more representative and inclusive manner, but at the same time maintains its traditions and values in a tolerant and open manner. We agreed on the necessary multilateral parliamentary dialogue in which the IPU is essential.



IPU President Gabriela Cuevas with President of the Advisory Council Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal Al Mawali.



Chairman of the State Council, Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al-Manthri and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas. © The court of the royal hospitality

Once my working tour in the Middle East was over, it was time for me to preside over the **First meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament** from 8 to 9 February in Geneva, **Switzerland**. The

Fifth World Conference will take place in 2020 and will be of the utmost importance in the defence of multilateralism, the construction of a more inclusive world through the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda and the strengthening of parliaments as the most important institution of citizen representation. For this event to be developed successfully, I chaired the four meetings of the Preparatory Committee to discuss all the necessary arrangements and, along with the President of the Serbian Parliament, Maja Gojkovic, we seized the occasion to have a signing ceremony to acknowledge **Serbia** as host of the 141st IPU Assembly.

During that weekend, we gathered for four different meetings and worked on ways to bring parliaments closer to our citizens, to design institutions that invigorate the democratic governance, to develop action plans to prioritize families who wish to be included in better development policies, to foresee solutions to the challenges posed by possible upcoming economic downturns (especially in terms of jobs and wages) to come up with strategies to tackle climate change and the enormous social inequality that still continues to afflict our societies, among other topics.

On 10 February, the **Arab's Parliament Hearing Session** took place in Cairo, **Egypt**, aiming to discuss the removal of Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism and to exchange different views from participants. On this occasion, the President of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group, MP Duarte Pacheco, attended in my place, just as MP Ulrika Karlsson did in September 2018 during the **First Arab Regional Seminar on the implementation of the SDGs**. Maintaining the presence and participation of the IPU in regional and parliamentary gatherings is of high importance because they represent the efforts of neighbouring nations to cooperate and coordinate for the good of their people, which is, in essence, what the IPU tries to foster.

During the meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament we also gathered with a team from the United Nations to work on the last details for the **Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations**, which was held from 21 to 22 February. This year's hearing reviewed the multilateral system, and in so doing, it was a platform to discuss how national politics and institutions can bolster the multilateral system in all its aspects. On this occasion, I was very pleased to have a conversation with Secretary-General, António Guterres and the President of the General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa. The conversation was also attended by my colleagues, the Secretary General of the IPU, Martin Chungong; the President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, Susan Kihika; the Vice-President of the Standing Committee on UN Affairs, Safa Al-Hashem; the Speaker of the Shura Council, Ahmad bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud, as well as part of the team from the IPU Secretariat to talk about the importance of the relationship between the United Nations and the IPU, and reaffirm the commitment of the IPU to the Sustainable Development Agenda. On the next day, together with UNOCT USG Voronkov and the Head of the IPU Standing Committee on Peace and International Security, Mr. Echániz, we discussed strengthening UN-IPU cooperation to counterterrorism together.



First meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 5th World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments 2019. © IPU/Jorky

As President of the IPU, I am certain that defending multilateralism is fundamental to allowing us to continue facing our common challenges together and to achieve the 2030 agenda. In a time of low trust in the democratic model of governance, standing up for multilateralism is indispensable. With this in mind, I was honoured to address the Annual Parliamentary Hearing with a speech that stressed the need to regard the defense of multilateralism as a way of safeguarding the national interest: we face many common problems that we cannot fight them alone. Today more than ever, togetherness is imperative.

had the opportunity to make an intervention from the floor about the need to keep on working to achieve gender parity and to make 50 per cent women's representation in parliament and government a global objective. I then participated in the event organized jointly by the IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on sexual violence. In this panel we discussed about ways to prevent and combat sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, as well as steps that need to be taken to avoid violence against women in the context of elections.



UN Secretary-General, António Guterres and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas. © UN Photo/Loey Felipe

A few weeks later, it was time to come back to UN headquarters from 11 to 14 March, but this time to attend the sixty-third session of the **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)**, where social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was discussed. On 11 March, I took part in a high-profile panel, which was a dialogue between international civil society leaders and women parliamentary leaders on promoting the human rights of women and girls at the international and national levels of governance. I was glad to share my experiences in this field, most of all because of my great commitment to the gender agenda.

On 13 March, there was a **Parliamentary Meeting**, where the main goal was to share good practices developed by parliaments on how to pass laws on, allocate budgets to and conduct oversight of gender-responsive social protection systems that women can effectively access and benefit from. And finally, on 14 March I participated in the side event "Critical Mass to Gender Parity – Women in Government DO Make a Difference!" where along with other high-level women panellists, and in partnership with several NGOs such as the **League of Women Voters (LWV)**, we discussed how women leaders have brought about positive change, especially in the area of social protection programs and in efforts to eliminate gender-based violence against women. I took this opportunity to stress how important it is to make politics a safe place for women, and how violence against women should never be normalized nor disregarded as women still suffer in this sphere. The picture of politics and power is changing as more women enter politics. We need more women in power so that younger generations get inspired and magnify this movement.



IPU President Gabriela Cuevas on Parliamentary Day, UN Women CSW63. © Joel Thomas Sheakoski

The second day of CSW63 was a very exciting one, since I took part in two different side events and a press conference. The first side event was the High-Level Event on "Women in Power" organized by the President of the General Assembly, in which I

3. Our achievements and the projects to come

We have worked hard during these last months, however, there is still much to be done. For the first time, I will hold a **High-Level Dialogue** with presidents of parliaments during our 140th Assembly in Qatar. I hope for this dialogue to serve as an additional mechanism of coordination, and also a way of having a closer dialogue, greater exchange of experiences and better possibilities to strengthen the relationship between IPU Members.

One of our pending issues is the global economic agenda, which cannot remain behind in the work of our Organization. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (PCWTO), the P-20 and the IPU Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade should have a more articulate strategy, which will allow us to respond in a more appropriate way to the enormous challenges posed by trade wars, alternative payment mechanisms, protectionism, and the technological revolution that will undoubtedly bring changes in jobs, salaries and production mechanisms. The IPU must strengthen its content in economic matters and be a platform for economy-related debates so that we can address these challenges. Conscious of these needs, the new Co-President of the PCWTO Steering Committee, Margaret Mensah-Williams, as well as the new members of this Committee, seek to give greater importance to the agenda along with the European Parliament. I therefore proposed to the IPU Secretary General and, in April, to the Executive Committee that we create an **Advisory Group on Economy**. The world today demands a deeper analysis on economic growth, jobs, salaries and technological changes, and we as parliamentarians should be equipped with the best tools to face these challenges so as to avoid to the greatest extent that they negatively affect our populations. We are certain that we could very much benefit from the opinions and advice of other experts to help us consolidate this Advisory Group. In this regard, we should keep on identifying experts who could offer us their views and suggestions on this very important project.

Another aspect we should direct our efforts to is the **Advisory Group on Health**. This Group serves as a global parliamentary focal point for health-related legislative work, – which is nowadays imperative –, offers guidance to IPU Members on the implementation of international health commitments and helps design information and training materials for parliaments. That is why, in addition to having a renewed and more active commitment to the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH), it is essential to innovate in our work. Hence, we have prepared a 3-hour workshop on maternal, newborn and child health at the 140th Assembly where our Advisory Group on Health will actively participate to share good legislative practices, but also will be able to listen and profit from valuable experiences of high-level panellists.

Our **130th anniversary** as an Organization is coming up soon. June 30 will be a special date to celebrate the inclusive, plural and democratic organization we have become, but also to recog-

nize the challenges that we are still to face. We must dedicate to this anniversary not only one day but carry out communication efforts and hold commemoration events throughout the year. That is why, looking at it as a chance to share with the world who we are and where we stand as a 130-year-old Organization, the initiative to publish a **book** would be a very good way to document our work and ensure an enduring legacy. What we have done and what we want to achieve should be the focal point of this publication and with this, we can effectively communicate to the world what we are doing to build a more democratic world as established in our mandate. However, we still have to find donors to cover part of the expenses for this book, for which I kindly ask for your support and to communicate with me on this regard.

We also have a very exciting project coming up, which is the **Leadership seminar on strengthening democracy**. My interest in organizing this event is to assist and mentor outstanding and talented parliamentarians who could deeply benefit from further harnessing leadership skills that would then be used for the



good of their respective countries and of the world. With this Seminar, the IPU can potentially encourage youth participation in politics and build capacities for parliamentarians who are seeking tools to transform their national realities. This initiative is in the process of being prepared and we hope to launch the call soon. The quality of our assemblies, seminars and events should always be improving, so I have been involved in an initiative to find speakers who can give us better perspectives and tools to do our work in this and other IPU events. I encourage you to generate synergies and to join us in the planning of this Seminar by finding ways to obtain financing and forging partnerships with think tanks and the best Universities in the world. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any ideas that you wish to be taken into account.

Coming up with ways to generate stronger and better communication within and outside our Organization is also a pending task. We have advanced in our presence on **social media**, most of all on Twitter and Instagram, but we must continue striving to occupy more space and relevance in these networks. In this regard, the Executive Committee is already considering a communication strategy for the IPU. The next and urgent step is to link it up with the geopolitical groups and national parliaments so as to effectively have impact, resonance and relevance beyond Geneva.



In addition, to strengthen our ties within the IPU, we must further encourage the use of technologies with more inclusive and flexible platforms. A **permanent mobile device application** could serve this purpose, allowing us to have access to the most relevant information and tools from the IPU – such as studies, handbooks, reports, etc. – as well as serving as a means of communication that can be used throughout the year and not only during our Assemblies. We should create a technological space for communication.

Another promising and urgent communication tool we should develop is a **directory of IPU parliamentarians**. Developing such a platform is important for us to know who we are, what we do, what topics we are working on and how we can share them. To make this directory possible, please do send us your contact information by email to president@ipu.org.

Strengthening our ties means not only being in touch more frequently but also being present. As promised during our 139th Assembly, I carried out several work tours that included 18 countries during these six months. This summer, I hope to attend several invitations in Europe and make work visits to some Caribbean, Central American, South American and African countries, just as I had committed to doing during my campaign for the IPU Presidency. I will surely continue paying work visits to the geopolitical groups and holding bilateral meetings during the 140th Assembly.

As has been detailed in this report, my work tours have also involved meeting and dialoguing with international leaders. This has allowed me to get to know first-hand diverse international realities and support diverse agendas, most of all the humanitarian agenda, which is much needed on our planet. Furthermore, closer coordination with forums and regional assemblies has been fostered during the last year and a half. I would like to highlight the very relevant cooperation and dialogues we have developed with the **Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO)**, the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**, and the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** on specific projects through lunches organized in the framework of our Assemblies.

My hope for the IPU is not only to create the conditions necessary for us to work closer and more actively together, but also to include more parliamentarians whose countries are not members of our Organization yet. Therefore, I will strive to hold regional meetings with the aim of affiliating these countries. I would like to recognize **Suriname** for assuming the leadership to organize one of these meetings in the Caribbean where speakers and parliamentarians attended with the aim of having their first contact with the IPU. In addition, my full recognition goes for **Qatar** who made an enormous effort to include parliaments that are not yet members of the IPU in the 140th Assembly. I also congratulate the **Mercosur Parliament (PARLASUR)** for already requesting to be an observer of the IPU. However, most of all, I am pleased to report that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will soon be the 179th member of the IPU. Our relationship with assemblies and

regional parliamentary forums is growing and it is essential to continue as such so as to achieve universal membership.

In the year and a half to come, I will also continue reinforcing our strategic alliances with key international organizations and UN bodies, such as the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** and the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**. I have been in close communication with Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC and also with the directors of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) to work on specific strategies to enhance our cooperation on topics of climate change and energy respectively. The successful work we have done together carrying out joint events and sharing common goals require a more institutional, ambitious and sustained cooperation frameworks. Therefore, I have already proposed that the directives of these organizations develop new cooperation strategies and hope we can soon deliver results on this matter.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge now that we have made good progress in the implementation of some global agreements through the support of some of our members and in alliance with other organizations. I thank **Morocco** for its leadership in carrying out the Seminar in Rabat on occasion of the Adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, since it was a very enriching experience that certainly will result in positive changes in favour of the migrants. Moreover, with the **UNFCCC**, we have successfully pushed forward the climate change agenda and acquired tools to implement the Paris Agreement, which must be urgently put into practice. With the **PMNCH** in **India** we have advanced far on finding ways for improving maternal, newborn and child health. Similarly, with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNDG)** and **UNCTAD**, we have progressed in terms of financing for development, a central task of the 2030 Agenda.

I am also happy to share with you that our decisions today take a more inclusive democratic form. The composition of the **Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament** and the **High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (HLAG)**, are for the first time open to the vote of Members through the geopolitical groups. Likewise, the **PCWTO** and the **Advisory Group on Health** today have a much more balanced composition than before, representing all the geopolitical groups.

After this effort to improve transparency, which I consider an obligation and a mandate, we have been able to go through the work carried out by the Presidency of the Inter-Parliamentary Union together. In order to fulfil the objectives of our Organization, it is necessary to build a new confidence. This can only be achieved through an ethic based on service and commitment, absolute transparency and order, democracy and inclusion. I know that this is demanding, but it is completely possible and I count on the support of each and every one of you.

In this vast panorama of things, affecting the entire world, I wish to make a commitment with our Organization and with all of you, to use the remaining months of my presidency to redouble efforts, while deeply and sincerely recognizing the value that each one of you hold, above all, to harness the strength that parliaments have when they look together in the same direction and towards the same goal.

Although on my various visits to different countries I have heard visions that filled me with concern about the challenges of climate change and inequality, unilateralism and economic crises, violence and terrorism, poverty and hunger, I must also say that I have been able to see the strength of women and men, young people and those with more experience, who, without placing any limits on their confidence in the future, have wanted to embrace with hope the years to come, knowing that there is no limit when we advance hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder. In this way, we give the best of ourselves for the sake of the wellbeing of our communities.

The IPU is ready to continue fulfilling its task and its purpose, alongside each of these men and women who do not want to build walls around the capacities of humanity.



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