



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Accountability report, IPU President Activities

Translating together international
commitments into national realities



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Accountability report, IPU President Activities

**Translating together international commitments
into national realities**

Dear Speakers of parliament,

Dear fellow parliamentarians, dearest friends,

The current context: an unprecedented health emergency

We are living through moments of great uncertainty. We know very little about the virus that has killed tens of thousands of people. As I write, its origin is still unknown, and we have not yet found a cure. The life we grew up with and got used to has disappeared across almost the entire planet. For at least several weeks, national economies have been dealt losses and setbacks not seen in generations. The restrictions on civil liberties to combat the pandemic throughout the world are reminiscent of similar measures during the Second World War. Multilateralism seems to have offered belated responses, with few solutions to the most important crisis facing humanity.

It is time to face the truth, as this is the only way to learn from our mistakes. Global organizations took too long to declare COVID-19 a pandemic. Some national governments have chosen to address the issue as a competition rather than through international cooperation. A poor exchange of information and low trust in its contents are hindering decision-making. Some leaders' disdain for science has killed thousands of people. It took two months to raise funds to care for refugees and support developing countries. A G20 Heads of State meeting was only organized once the global economic deterioration and the threat to millions of jobs had become evident. Yes, we were all taken by surprise by a pandemic that no one had imagined, **but it is now up to us to work decisively as a team towards solutions for the entire planet.**

I am aware that we are concentrating our efforts on combating this pandemic in our own countries – adapting hospitals, seeking more doctors and nurses, and obtaining medicines and equipment. After reviewing the measures many parliaments have shared with me, it is clear that our task, dear colleagues, has only just begun.

It is now that the planet needs the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) the most. It is we, the representatives of the people, who must assume our responsibility as one of the three branches of State power. It is we who must learn lessons, recognizing, thanking and prioritizing the front-line health and safety workers in our lives. It is we, parliamentarians, who must work at top speed towards a health system that can heal everyone. It is we who need to adjust budgets to get out of this emergency and restructure our economies so that they are more inclusive and able to maintain jobs and wages. It is we who have the enormous task of ensuring our citizens' liberties and rights, not only now but also once the health emergency is over.

The IPU can allow us to walk together. It can become the platform which enables us to **build common solutions to problems that do not take borders into account.** It is known that I am convinced the IPU must adapt to new times. This renewal is now upon us. And so global parliamentary dialogue must be energized and recover its political component and democratic objective. **The nature of the IPU is parliamentary, and if this indispensable element is diluted, the heart of our Organization will be lost forever.**

The IPU Presidency's work in the last six months

I would have liked to continue with the dynamism and intense commitment that I have always wanted to bring to my time as President of the IPU. But we all know that this has become impossible since the end of February. As time and conditions allowed, I have been able to do the following **since our last Assembly in Serbia: visit 17 countries;** participate in regional parliamentary meetings with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in **France**; support the emergence of a new parliamentary network to combat hunger as part of a south-south cooperation scheme promoted by **Morocco**; strengthen parliamentary commitment to ending corruption through a conference in **Qatar** of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC); back the work of MPs meeting in **Turkey** from the Asian Parliamentary Assembly by generating better proposals for parliamentary cooperation and dialogue; and assist in designing better legal frameworks that promote green energy development in the **United Arab Emirates**.

While, last year, I made regional visits to the Middle East and countries of the Arab peninsula, this semester I was able to complete my work in **Africa**. I appreciate the enormous generosity and hospitality of each of the nations, parliaments, and Speakers with whom I met. I also value the engaging meetings I attended, the special parliamentary sessions dedicated to the IPU, and my stimulating conversations with Heads of State.

An indispensable part of my work has been to bring the IPU closer to the Presidency of the UN General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General, and the UN agencies with which I am in constant contact. I believe that we have to move closer together by linking the parliamentarians who serve on IPU standing committees and working groups with the UN agencies that deal with the same issues. Operational coordination through the Secretariat is certainly important, but **parliamentarians cannot continue to stand on the sidelines of UN decision-making and projects**.

Over the past six months **I have participated in different events with the United Nations:** the opening of the Conference for Central Europe, *Prevention of radicalization to terrorism: Regional policy responses and risk mitigation*, organized in **Budapest** by the Government of **Hungary** and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT); the 2020 Annual Parliamentary Hearing organized by the IPU and the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, at UN Headquarters in **New York City**; and the parliamentary meeting, *Securing our common future: An agenda for disarmament*, designed for parliamentarians, parliamentary organizations and UN delegations to discuss how parliamentarians can advance the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament. I also launched the map, *Women in Politics: 2020*, at a joint virtual event with **UN Women** Executive Director, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

In addition, I am a member of the UN High-Level Steering Group for the **Every Woman, Every Child movement**, and of the Political Advisory Panel for the universal health coverage movement, **UHC2030**.

Responsibilities and work in progress

I have also spent significant time energizing some of the mechanisms and working groups of the IPU:

- Our standing committee bureaux will soon be renewed as their terms are coming to an end. We need delegations **to commit to proposing bureaux members with increasingly specialized knowledge**. This will allow us to advance a more proactive agenda, with permanent access to advice where needed. For example, I promoted a debate in the Executive Committee on the urgent and necessary economic agenda for the IPU. This was because, according to the Secretary General's reports, there are no economic specialists in the Secretariat.
- The regional and gender representation of the Advisory Group on Health is now fully balanced. True coordination between the Group and the World Health Organization is of the utmost importance so that the Group can become a permanent mentorship and support space for all its members.
- **The IPU needs to provide more useful technical support.** During this health crisis, it may have been useful to publish guidelines, legislative proposals and advice on budgeting for the pandemic. Instead, we collected national experiences and posted them on social media. It was a nice initiative, but the IPU must lead global solutions. **Our committees and groups are a great opportunity for that leadership, provided that we, as parliamentarians, work more closely with technical teams at the United Nations.**
- The Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (PCWTO) is a mechanism for the IPU to cooperate with the European Parliament. It is an excellent initiative that can provide greater transparency and a parliamentary component to WTO debates and decisions. Although we have sought greater commitment, it has been very difficult to revitalize the PCWTO because some members have been absent. I once again **ask its members to participate more actively or tell us if they no longer wish to attend Steering Committee meetings**. Today more than ever, we must make the most of mechanisms that deal with economic issues in the IPU so that they can provide potential solutions to national parliaments.
- I want to thank the presidents and bureaux of the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security, the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights, the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the Committee on Middle East Questions, the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, the Advisory Group on Health, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. I also want to thank the chairs and boards of the High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, the Sub-Committee on Finance, the Group of Facilitators for Cyprus, and the Gender Partnership Group. In addition, I highly value the enthusiastic and committed support of their bureaux members who give a parliamentary soul to their debates and decisions. They take the lead so that IPU resolutions and the outcomes of panels, events and seminars can always help to bring solutions to our people when we return home to implement them.
- I have been particularly involved in counter-terrorism, where I have worked with UNOCT and our High-Level Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. I congratulate the Group on its close coordination with UNOCT in terms of dialogue, face-to-face meetings, exchanges, proposals and events.
- We have worked with members of the Preparatory Committee and the IPU Secretariat on plans for the **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**. We cannot predict the behaviour of the pandemic, but we continue to work, so that **the Conference materializes as an opportunity to build as a team, give more encouragement to multilateralism that is currently so much under threat**, and deliver answers and solutions to a planet that now faces a health crisis, economic upheaval and a climate emergency.
- We cannot forget one of the most important responsibilities of the IPU: defending the human rights of parliamentarians. Our colleagues at the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and the Secretariat team who supports them, are making an enormous effort at a time when complaints are constantly on the rise. Dear colleagues, we cannot take democracy for granted while parliamentarians are harassed, while military forces enter congress sessions to pressure members into voting in a particular way, and while parliamentarians' lives are in danger because they express their opinion. If we want to fulfil our mandate which establishes that we have to be proactive in defending democracy, we cannot forget that parliaments are its basis and foundation. Without them, democracy will falter.
- **I am the second woman to preside over the IPU. Looking after women's empowerment is therefore essential, and a primary concern of my agenda.** That is why we worked with the Executive Director of UN Women to launch the map, *Women in Politics: 2020*. It provides a very comprehensive picture of where the world stands on women's representation. Women's voices must be heard at the highest levels of decision-making, and leaders should support women to be part of those processes. On International Women's Day, I released a joint statement with the President of the European Parliament, Mr. David Sassoli, reaffirming that we would redouble our efforts to ensure that every girl and every woman can live free from violence and discrimination.

- Two innovative projects have been carried out: the first is our **book on the 130th anniversary of the IPU**, which is being produced despite the obstacles, as the President obtained the support of a Member of the IPU to finance this initiative that commemorates the 130 years of the Organization; and second, the first edition of the **Leadership Seminar for Parliamentarians**, which was carried out jointly with the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education in Mexico, and the President managed to finance 49 per cent of the cost of the Seminar. **Although the Secretariat was responsible for implementing the projects, I believe it is important for the IPU Presidency to be able to seek support to achieve our objectives.**
- I have personally made a significant effort to economize my use of the travel resources that the Presidency may draw on when representing the IPU. I hope I will have a mechanism to outline the savings we have made in 2019.

Representing the IPU is an enormous responsibility. In every single one of these opportunities, I have aimed to champion the relevance of parliaments, advocate the virtues of teamwork between the different levels of power in a country, and request that **more women and young people be involved in decision-making**, including in executive branches of power.

All in all, accountability is of the utmost importance. If I advocate for transparency and checks and balances, I consider that I must lead by example. Therefore, I urge you to join me in the following pages where I present my activity report, so that we can discuss the results of my performance over the last six months as President of the IPU.

Dear colleagues,

The first event I would like to mention is the **141st Assembly of the IPU**. It was special because I was also celebrating two years in my role as the IPU President, which has been one of the highest honours I have ever received.

The Assembly brought together more than 2,000 delegates from 150 countries, including 75 Speakers of parliament. We dedicated our work to **international law** and addressed very important issues. As parliamentarians, we must build bridges and foster peace to promote tolerance, love and respect. Hate narratives, xenophobia and discrimination have no place in the twenty-first century.

I want to thank the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Ms. Maja Gojković, for her hospitality and, above all, her great commitment and dedication to organizing the Assembly.



Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Ms. Maja Gojković.

My work in Serbia included: running bilateral meetings to better understand the needs of each country, parliament and fellow legislator; participating in a workshop on implementing national gender and youth quota laws; working with the Advisory Group on Health and the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights towards a resolution on universal health coverage; celebrating the 130th anniversary of the IPU; and discussing issues such as security, human rights, development and inclusion with Speakers of parliament.



141st Assembly in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also took place in October. I participated in the Assembly's **European Conference of Presidents of Parliament**. This was an essential element in encouraging parliamentarians to translate global commitments into local solutions, so that we can achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



European Conference of Presidents of Parliament.

The second Sustainable Development Goal is ambitiously overwhelming: zero hunger. **Morocco** took a south-south cooperation lead on food sufficiency by calling all African, Latin American and Arab regional parliaments to a broad dialogue in order to exchange best practices and national policies.

In my address, I highlighted the urgency of turning words and speeches into clear actions. It is our obligation to legislate

and approve budgets that prioritize the millions of people who are suffering or even starving. We have to act now. Guaranteeing the right to food is a responsibility that we cannot allow ourselves to overlook.

On 4 November, I was delighted to co-chair the **Sixth G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20)** with the House of Councillors of the National Diet of **Japan**. The global economy poses important challenges: technological change, inclusion, and an urgent need for better wealth distribution, jobs, wages and gender equality.

One of the principles of my IPU presidency has been **innovation**. I believe that the IPU needs to strengthen its economic agenda because our peoples are demanding better living conditions, jobs, wages and benefits, a decent retirement, and urgent action to stop climate change.

We have held P20 sessions (parliamentary meetings run in parallel with G20 events) for the last two years. Why is the P20 mechanism important?

Governments meet in the G20 and discuss and agree on programmes and public policies that affect people's lives. These debates and agreements require transparency and scrutiny. Above all, good proposals need implementation. This usually occurs through the legislative bodies that translate proposals into laws and approve budgets.



Sixth G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20).

During my visit to the European Parliament, I met its President, Mr. David Sassoli, had a hearing, and held very positive talks with the Parliament's committees on foreign affairs (AFET), women's rights and gender equality (FEMM), and international trade (INTA).

Cooperation between the IPU and the European Parliament is essential to defend multilateralism, promote equality between women and men, and strengthen democratic capacity around the world. One result of the visit was that Mr. Sassoli and I issued a joint statement for International Women's Day (8 March 2020). As Presidents of our organizations, we reaffirmed our commitment to urgent action that would achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.



President of the European Parliament, Mr. David Sassoli.

Later in November, I spoke at the **Opening of the Conference for Central Europe, Prevention of radicalization to terrorism: Regional policy responses and risk mitigation**, organized by the Government of Hungary and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

What leads hundreds of young people to leave their countries and join terrorist groups? What does it say about our own shortcomings

when young people are pushed towards radicalization and choose a path of hatred and death? In my message, I stressed that terrorism is not synonymous with any religion, nationality, ethnic group or political preference.

To the contrary: terrorism only represents hatred, fear and death. Political responsibility is therefore essential to preventing radicalization.



Conference for Central Europe, Prevention of radicalization to terrorism: Regional policy responses and risk mitigation.

On 11 November, I had the honour of speaking at the **African Regional Parliamentary Conference, Comprehensive responses to refugee situations: Effective parliamentary approaches, in Midrand, South Africa**. Refugee protection is at the core of the IPU's work and is very close to my heart.

More than 70 million people are currently displaced around the world due to conflict and natural disasters, and numbers have been rising over the years. I stated that three parts of the role of parliamentarians were crucial to stopping this rise. First, legislation and legislative reform are some of the primary ways of responding to refugees' needs, as well as protecting both those who are fleeing and host communities. These frameworks must be inclusive and particularly sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable. Second, budgets must allocate sufficient funding to translate policy and legislative objectives into reality. Third, we have the power to hold our governments accountable for the commitments they make.

From 12 to 14 November, I attended the **International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Accelerating the promise**, in Nairobi, Kenya.

The aim of this year's conference was to create awareness of how sexual and reproductive health and rights are an essential element of universal health coverage. Those rights need to be guaranteed in a comprehensive, life-course approach to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I participated in the **panel discussion on opportunities and challenges as we move towards implementing the essential sexual and reproductive health package through a comprehensive life-course approach**. We discussed how we could overcome political controversies and step up development based on the evidence of what is needed and what women want.

The conference allowed me to present my analysis of the IPU resolution on achieving universal health coverage by 2030 that was adopted at our Belgrade Assembly the previous month (October 2019). I explained how the resolution could be used to leverage stronger national commitments and accountability for sexual and reproductive health and rights as part of universal health coverage.

In November 2019, the **second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament** took place. As IPU President, I am responsible for leading the Committee's work and reinforcing the message that we should make every possible effort to put people at the centre of our decisions and dedicate our endeavours to delivering prompt solutions. Transforming our communities and working as a team is the only way to build a better planet.



Second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.



Leadership Seminar for Parliamentarians, Mexico City.

From 25 to 28 November, we ran the IPU's first **Leadership Seminar for Parliamentarians**. Mexico took the initiative with the School of Government and Public Transformation of the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education.

One of the most important requests from my colleagues is that the IPU should be more active in developing capacity-building programmes. The leadership seminar was our first effort in designing a more specialized curriculum by teaching the values, knowledge and tools that are needed to improve results in our countries.

My commitment to **fighting global corruption** also gave me the opportunity to participate in the **Seventh Global Conference of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (9 December, Doha, Qatar)**. Although we must urgently work on better laws and institutions, it is also essential that we understand corruption as a problem of integrity and trust.

There are 46,000 parliamentarians in the world. We have the power to change laws and budgets. We need to be the generation that takes responsibility for ending corruption forever.

During my visit I **spoke to the Vice Emir of Qatar** together with the President of the Shura Council and Speakers of Parliament. I would like to thank the Qatari people for their generous hospitality.



Seventh Global Conference of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (Doha, Qatar).

On 10 December, I took part in a **parliamentary meeting** held on the occasion of the **25th UN climate change conference (COP 25)** in **Madrid, Spain**. I am grateful to the Royal Courts, the Congress of Deputies and the Spanish Senate for organizing this meeting with the IPU.

From 13 to 18 December, the **Asian Parliamentary Assembly** met for its 12th Plenary Session in **Antalya, Turkey**, to discuss the **role of multilateral cooperation among Asian parliaments**.



Parliamentary meeting on the occasion of COP 25, Madrid, Spain.

The IPU was founded 130 years ago as the first political multilateral organization. It was dedicated to promoting democracy and human rights through parliamentary diplomacy. But allow me to take a step back and reflect: why do we discuss multilateralism so much?

Multilateral organizations are the space best-suited for plural dialogue and shared solutions.

Tragically, current events have shown that humanity has forgotten the hard-learned lessons from the twentieth century: hate brings war, and discrimination brings death.

Some voices are promoting unilateralism and hate narratives. However, let us keep in mind that we, as parliamentarians, have to defend multilateralism as much as possible. This can be done by translating international commitments into national realities, and offering our people solutions drawn from the best experiences of other regions.

While in Turkey, I also **discussed multilateralism with the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şentop.**



Asian Parliamentary Assembly, 12th Plenary Session: *The role of multilateral cooperation among Asian parliaments.*

When the new year arrived, my first visit as IPU President was to the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** to attend the **IRENA¹ 2020 Legislators Forum on 10 January**. I was a panellist and addressed the important role of legislators in scaling up energy transformation. The whole day was dedicated to discussing and developing proposals.

I also **met with the President of the UAE Federal National Council, Mr. Saqr Ghobash**, and the IPU delegation participating. We agreed to work together in the fight against

1 International Renewable Energy Agency



IRENA 2020 Legislators Forum, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

terrorism and violent extremism, and on sustainability and gender equality. As a Mexican, I agree with great enthusiasm that the UAE and Mexico believe in and practice gender parity in legislation. We certainly still have great challenges to overcome regarding the exercise of women's rights, but I am sure that we will achieve positive results soon.

One of the IPU's main strategic objectives is to empower young people. This can be achieved by ensuring young women and men hold representative positions. My next visit was to **Djibouti**, where I must say that they know a great deal about including young people: 32 per cent of MPs are under 45!



Prime Minister of Djibouti, Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed.

I thank the Prime Minister of Djibouti, Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed, and the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Mohamed Ali Houmed, for their warm welcome and our productive meetings. The IPU works closely with the National Assembly of Djibouti on human rights, youth, and gender equality.

Likewise, I welcome the very positive progress Djibouti has made on gender equality and tackling violence against women and girls.

In line with my commitment to visit Africa again, I visited **Seychelles**. Even though these beautiful islands have a small parliament, there is very effective participation. This includes both a Youth Assembly and one of the highest proportions of women holding ministerial office in Africa. These are crucial factors, necessary for a truly inclusive democracy.

During the visit, I met with the Speaker, Mr. Nicholas Prea, and fellow parliamentarians. I also met the President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure, and the Vice-President, Mr. Vincent Meriton. We discussed the importance of defending multilateralism as a space for dialogue where all countries can build solutions to common problems, especially climate change. The IPU's role and responsibility is fundamental, since it is the only global organization where the popular representatives of 179 nations meet.



President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure.

Parliamentarians and legislative institutions have not only an obligation, but also a vocation to represent their citizens. Nonetheless, people's trust in their representatives has decreased. Democracies appear to be weakening in the face of populism and authoritarianism, and parliaments can seem distant and unable to meet people's needs.



Speaker Nicholas Prea and MPs of Seychelles.

When I visited Uganda, I attended part of *Parliament Week*, a very thought-provoking event run by the Ugandan legislature. By opening its doors to the public, the Parliament generated transparent and informative material about its responsibilities and what it delivers. Hundreds of citizens – mainly young people – role-played as parliamentarians in a one-day exercise. This included voting to elect ministers and a Speaker, and a vote to adopt the day’s resolutions on how to strengthen democracy in Uganda.

I welcomed my **meeting with the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.** In addition to working closely with Parliament, he is very well informed about the Ugandan delegation’s work with the IPU.

I would like to thank: the **Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, Ms. Rebecca Kadaga,** for her invitation; the parliamentarian, Ms. Esther Anyakun, for her commitment to the IPU Executive Committee and her invaluable support to women; and Ms. Mourine Osuru, who was our global leader of young parliamentarians, and an active advocate for inclusion.



President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni; Speaker of Parliament, Ms. Rebecca Kadaga; MP, Ms. Esther Anyakun.

I feel very privileged to say that my next engagement was in **Burkina Faso** at the inauguration of the **15th conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.**

I had the opportunity to address the parliamentarians attending, and to highlight my solidarity with the Palestinian people. Terrorism follows no religion and there can be no solution when trying to impose borders by force.

As a Catholic invited to an Islamic conference, I appreciated the great opportunity to learn more about a religion that speaks of love and brotherhood.



15th conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (Burkina Faso).

I had the honour of visiting **Namibia** and learning about its culture, history and parliamentary tradition.

Discussions were very engaging at my official meeting with the **Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Peter Katjavivi, and the Chairperson to the National Council, Mr. Bernard Songa Sibalatani.**

I also had the opportunity to meet with the President of Namibia, Mr. Hage Geingob, and with Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, former President of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, and our Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.



President of Namibia, Mr. Hage Geingob.

I welcome the great work of the Namibian delegation to the IPU and everything we have achieved as a team.

After my work in Africa had concluded, an important event followed: the **annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations (UN Headquarters, New York City).** It was organized by the IPU and the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande.



The President of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande.

In the **Opening Session**, I discussed Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education). I outlined that, as problems in education do not respect borders or nationalities, international dialogue and cooperation are essential. Education should not be the preserve of a privileged few. That is why it is an urgent priority to make sure the human right to education can truly be exercised by everyone across the world. Achieving that vision will involve high-quality teaching, trained and well-paid teachers, decent and safe infrastructure, and curriculums that promote gender equality and environmental responsibility and also help students to become better citizens, committed to democracy and human rights.

During my stay in New York, I met with a range of different people, including **Professor Jeffrey Sachs**, an American economist, academic, public policy analyst, and former director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. We discussed what could be done to connect parliaments digitally, and to establish training and monitoring mechanisms for projects designed to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

I was also able to visit **UN Women**, where I met with the **Executive Director, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**. We considered the most effective ways of achieving gener-

ational equality and reviewed the statistics that underpin the *Women in Politics* map, on which our organizations work together.

As it is important to stay in close contact with IPU delegates, I also held meetings with many IPU delegations, including those from Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Yemen.

On the last day of the Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, I made my closing remarks with the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Muhammad-Bande. I also gave a short address at an IPU reception held for all delegates and speakers who attended the Hearing. It was a great honour.



Remarks at the IPU reception held in the Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations.

The Hearing is an especially important event because it enables parliamentarians from around the world to exchange best practices from their countries. This year, the debate centred on how to improve access to education and lifelong learning for citizens of all ages, especially for women, girls and marginalized people.

The day after the UN Hearing, I stayed in New York for a parliamentary meeting, ***Securing our common future: An agenda for disarmament***. This was a forum for parliamentarians, parliamentary organizations and UN delegations to discuss the UN Secretary-General's disarmament agenda and how parliamentarians could advance it in cooperation with governments, the United Nations and civil society.

I delivered welcoming remarks and contributed to the main discussions as a panellist. We reviewed the key elements of the UN Secretary-General's agenda for disarmament, reflected on current conflicts and arms races, and took stock of disarmament agreements and negotiations.



Parliamentary meeting, *Securing our common future: An agenda for disarmament*.

The IPU supports parliaments throughout the world with knowledge tools based on technical and scientific research to help MPs take evidence-based decisions. The publications we develop with our partners provide practical guidance for parliamentarians on legal instruments, policy responses and specific actions that can effectively tackle health challenges.

The IPU's leadership on women's, children's and adolescents' health has long been recognized by international partners. As I am a member of the **High-Level Steering Group for Every Woman, Every Child (EWECE)**, I attended a **virtual meeting** of the Group on 5 March.

The Steering Group discussed opportunities and threats to the EWECE agenda. We then debated how to fill funding gaps and establish a sustained and coherent global advocacy and investment plan to end the preventable deaths of mothers, children and adolescents, and ensure their health and well-being.

In March, events were complicated by the **COVID-19** global health emergency.

The pandemic is a global challenge that has spared almost no countries in the world. States are making extensive efforts to provide health services and cover all their citizens' needs to mitigate the impact of the virus. Nevertheless, it is impossible to predict how this health emergency will evolve over the coming months. As our priority is everyone's health and wellbeing, events planned for March and April were cancelled.

We have had to find virtual solutions to everything we do. I must say that we have learned an important lesson as a result. This year, **technology** will play an important role. As parliamentarians, we must promote better distance learning and equitable access to it.

On 18 March, I jointly launched the map, ***Women in Politics: 2020***, at a virtual event with the Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

The map is a very comprehensive picture of where the world stands when it comes to women in politics. Countries are ranked according to the percentage of women in parliament and in ministerial positions. The map sets out where women are to be found in the highest spheres of decision-making, both in parliament and government. It also lists the main ministerial portfolios that women hold.

At the IPU, we have been supporting countries that have the political will to strive for gender balance. Our support has included leading activities and spreading knowledge to develop an understanding among politicians, civil society and the general public of the importance of women's participation in politics.



Virtual launch of the map, *Women in Politics: 2020*, with Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The map was jointly created by the IPU and UN Women.

On 24 March, I attended the first virtual meeting of the political advisory panel to the universal health coverage movement, **UHC2030**. Health is a precondition for and an outcome of sustainable development. But the right to health is still denied to many.

At least half the world's population is still not fully covered for essential health services. For example, we must not forget that 290,000 women still die every year from pregnancy and child-birth complications, and that vast inequalities persist across the world. Maternal mortality is nearly 50 times higher for women in sub-Saharan Africa than it is for those in high-income countries.

In the face of these challenges, parliaments have a key role to play as agents of change for the health and well-being of their populations. We are responsible for developing a comprehensive framework to promote health and human rights. But we must also ensure that these rights are converted into equitable access to health and well-being for all sectors of society.



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