



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong

United Nations Human Rights Council High-Level Segment

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Mr. President,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Members of the Human Rights Council,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. President,

The IPU has accompanied the development of the Human Rights Council since its inception. From the outset, we have argued that parliaments are natural partners of your Council. For your deliberations and decisions to become truly meaningful they must translate into action within your countries. Much of that requires decisions in parliament to ratify international conventions and agreements, to translate them into national policies and laws, to allocate funding and to exercise the oversight that is the hallmark of responsible government.

The IPU welcomes the Council's increased focus on national implementation and the involvement of national parliaments therein. Since the adoption in 2014 of the Council's first resolution on the contribution of parliaments to its work, the IPU has pursued its sensitization campaign to encourage its Member Parliaments to be part of this process. We have made significant strides as shown by the increasing involvement of parliaments and their members in all stages of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), including their participation in the national delegations that come before the Council to present their reports. By the way, I understand a distinguished Member of Parliament from Pakistan will be addressing this session of the Human Rights Council on behalf of her country.

We are pleased that the Human Rights Council recognizes these achievements and is increasingly keen to strengthen its relationship with parliaments, in partnership with the IPU. The recent Human Rights Council resolution 35/29, a second one on the role of parliaments, indeed reinforces our hope for greater involvement of parliamentarians in the work of the Council. I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the members of the Core Group and to all the sponsors who are supporting this initiative.

The Universal Periodic Review is of course not the only area where it makes sense for the Human Rights Council to work more closely with national parliaments and, by extension, with the IPU. Your agenda correlates closely with that of parliaments. At

the heart of what goes on in parliament is a desire to uphold and preserve the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual. The IPU therefore encourages you to reach out to parliaments in a more systematic manner. We have a standing commitment to assist in this endeavour.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,

The IPU is a political organization that was created to promote peace and cooperation and one that has worked in a great many countries over the years to help establish and strengthen democracy.

The causes of conflicts are numerous. Today they seem more complex and intractable than ever. Yet, at the heart of the matter, crisis often occurs because the will of the people is no longer the basis of the authority of a government that has ceased to be transparent and accountable. Tolerance and respect for those who have different beliefs or customs seem to have been abandoned. Political violence is soon followed by physical violence and countries descend into a vicious circle of ever-greater violations of people's most fundamental rights.

In the face of today's crises, it is imperative that we work in support of the fundamental components of democracy, such as representation, transparency, accountability and genuine and meaningful dialogue. It is crucial that we work to avoid and solve conflict and human rights violations. As we look to assist countries in overcoming these challenges, we should also be interested in providing support to the institutions of the State that are central to democracy, including the parliament.

Indeed, a parliament that truly represents the full diversity in society and that has the means at its disposal to represent the views of its constituents and hold government to account is a very powerful tool to avoid conflict, overcome divisions in society and uphold human rights. But it needs support as an institution. Let me highlight some ways in which the IPU is working to bolster parliaments as the guardians of human rights.

For parliaments to take their human rights responsibilities seriously their individual members must be able to do their work without fear of reprisals. The work of our Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians amply demonstrates that in many parts of the world, parliamentarians, in particular from the opposition, are at risk for merely expressing their views. Our Committee has a solid track record of protecting and offering redress to parliamentarians. However, more needs to be done to reverse the trend of shrinking space for dissent in many of our countries.

The IPU believes that democracy has to be inclusive and that therefore women and youth should be able to make their full contribution to public decision-making. We will soon publish our yearly analysis of the situation of women in parliament. What I can already tell you now is that every year the world is making progress, with the percentage of women parliamentarians being slightly above 23 per cent today. But progress is slowing. If we want to stand a chance of reaching parity within a generation, we need to take bolder actions to bring more women into parliament. With this in mind, the IPU continues to see the promotion of women's rights and their empowerment as one of our core priorities

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members,

Legitimacy requires inclusive governance and decision-making. We devote the same interest to the empowerment of youth, the spearhead of our future societies. In November 2017 we held our Fourth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Ottawa. Concrete recommendations and follow-up action to boost the representation of young people in parliaments and ensure accessible and affordable quality education for young people were some of the outcomes of that conference.

The IPU therefore stands ready to contribute from a parliamentary perspective to the implementation of the Human Rights Council recommendations on women and youth.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members,

I am sure you will agree with me that human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are two sides of the same coin. Most of the SDG targets are grounded in international human rights law. Securing progress towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda of “leaving no one behind” is therefore impossible without the implementation of human rights obligations and commitments. In turn, stronger protection and promotion of human rights will automatically lead to enhanced implementation of the SDGs.

The IPU is helping equip parliaments to effectively institutionalize the SDG agenda and mainstream the various goals into the legislative process. We therefore help parliaments assess their preparedness to engage with the SDGs and identify concrete ways for parliaments to take ownership of the SDGs agenda.

Mr. President,
Distinguished Members,

Worryingly, an increasing number of parliaments are under assault, their powers are being usurped or curtailed by the Executive, their members are being victimized. In short, their authority is being undermined. The will of the people is being subverted. Of course we should frown upon these developments. It is our bounden duty to urge respect for the integrity of parliaments and the representatives of the people.

I would like, however, to conclude on a positive note. At the same time, looking back over the past 30 years since the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed a renewed commitment to parliaments and their central role in democracy. Never before in human history have so many countries included a parliament in their system of governance as today nor have so many parliaments been the outcome of open political competition through free and fair elections.

I would like to suggest that we build on this achievement. We need to provide support to these institutions, many of which are still very young, and we should integrate them better in the global system for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you.