



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Opening remarks by Dr. Tulia Ackson President of the IPU

Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

8 February 2024, New York

President of the UN General Assembly,
Secretary General of the IPU,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations – my first as President of the IPU.

This unique *joint* event brings parliamentarians to New York to discuss with UN officials, ambassadors and experts' issues that are high on the international agenda including of peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, democracy and gender issues.

Dear Colleagues: today we are here to reflect on key questions of peace and security which affect all of us as representatives of the people. The record number of participants that I see in this room leaves no doubt as to the relevance and urgency of this year's meeting.

As we meet, we are reminded of the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

It essentially entails two crucial messages: Firstly, the human, environmental and economic cost of conflict is getting out of control. We need to focus a lot more on *prevention*.

Secondly, the multilateral system needs to be updated to be fit for the purpose with regard to conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

I think we all agree that UN diplomacy and assistance is better at repairing the soft tissue of international relations than the deep fractures that come with war and violent conflict.

Dear Parliamentarians; the world is looking with great expectation to the Summit of the Future in September for a clear plan and a timeline to fix the various parts of the UN machinery for peace and security.

As IPU debates have brought to light again and again: Security Council reform needs to be at the top of that plan. As representatives of the people of the world, we can all attest to the fact that the people we represent want this United Nations body, which is so critical to preserving and maintaining world peace and security, to better reflect the UN's diverse composition and the world's new geopolitics so that its capable of responding to responds to threats to peace timely *decisively* and *evenhandedly*.

These reforms are overdue, they are urgent as a precondition to the world international peace, stability, security and an effective multilateral order.

This year's hearing is part of a broad effort by the IPU to engage parliamentarians in preparations for the Summit of the Future for a better tomorrow.

Distinguished colleagues; the 148th IPU Assembly in March, in Geneva, will focus on parliamentary diplomacy for peace. At the same session, the IPU Committee on UN Affairs will debate a motion on

Security Council reform, and the Committee on Peace and International Security will adopt a resolution on autonomous weapons systems.

Like the United Nations, the IPU was born in response to war and despotic rule. For both of our organizations, peace, democracy and development go hand in hand: one cannot survive without the other.

As we said in the IPU Luanda Declaration last year: *There can be no peace without justice.*

And justice is precisely what is lacking around the world today.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the distribution of wealth – capital, technology, land and other resources – all of which are too heavily concentrated in just a few hands.

The same goes for our political systems, from which some people – the poor, women, youth, and minority groups - are effectively excluded. It is no coincidence that so many conflicts occur in places where democracy is severely lacking in one way or another.

As parliamentarians, we have a unique responsibility to work for peace.

Our first responsibility is to act as positive role models: treating each other with respect, avoiding unnecessary confrontations, approaching all political debates in a spirit of dialogue and with an eye toward the common good.

My fellow colleagues; we must work to change the way we do politics from the bottom up so that all people feel included and respected.

There is a special role for parliamentary diplomacy alongside official government channels. As parliamentarians, we must lead in creating the conditions for peaceful dialogue for our people.

Too many conflicts are born simply out of an inability to listen carefully to each other across political or geographical divides. Much as we may dislike someone and perceive them as the “enemy”, we must endeavor to see the world, and ourselves, from their perspective. That, in essence, is the first step on the road toward dialogue for peace.

At the same time, as parliamentarians, we must claim a stronger role in international affairs across the board, from development to security issues. This begins with stronger parliamentary oversight of our governments at home and internationally, here, at the UN.

On a more substantive level, we need to recognize the many ways in which injustice operates in the world and work to reverse it with greater investments in the things that really matter: education, health care, decent livelihoods, and all those things that make people feel secure in their lives.

In the face of so many unmet human needs, we should all be concerned that global military expenditures have grown well over two trillion dollars a year. Much as the UN has instituted mechanisms to curb down, but this remains a dangerous trend that we need to reverse as a matter of priority.

Colleagues,

I hope these two days will prove informative and *transformative*, motivating each one of us to work harder for peace – which, really, is the only way forward.

Thank you.