



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

World Conference on Youth Rights on “Engaging Youth in Global Action”

Thursday, 12 August 2021

Your excellencies (to be confirmed):

Madam Chair of the Senate,
Madam High Commissioner,
Madam Envoy on Youth,
Madam Secretary General,
Mr. Secretary General,
Madam President,
Mr. Executive Secretary,
Madam Director, and
Mr. First Deputy Speaker of the Oliy Majlis (listed as Moderator),

Ladies and gentlemen participating online,

It is a great honour to join you today on International Youth Day. I wish to thank and congratulate the Government of Uzbekistan, the National Human Rights Centre and all their partners for hosting this event and for prioritizing youth and human rights.

In June, I had the pleasure of visiting Uzbekistan and meeting the President and parliamentary leadership. I was very encouraged to see first-hand the efforts being made to enhance youth rights in the country and on the world stage.

As many of you know, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is the global organization of parliaments. We represent 179 parliaments and over 90 per cent of the world's population. I am proud to say that youth empowerment is one of our strategic priorities.

The IPU youth movement began in 2010, when parliaments from around the world adopted a ground-breaking resolution on *Youth participation*. I remember it well, as I served as Secretary of the Committee that worked on the text. Parliaments put forward almost 40 proposals on how to ensure greater youth participation in politics. This resolution remains just as relevant today as it was back then. It offers guidance on how to facilitate a better enabling environment for young people to engage in politics, including through education. It also proposes concrete measures to allow more young people to enter politics, such as quotas and the lowering of the age of eligibility for political office.

The resolution is the first and only international framework put forward by parliaments on youth, and it has been a cornerstone of the IPU's activities ever since. I hope that this text can serve as a useful resource to help inform a future convention on youth rights.

The resolution also led to the creation of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians. In only a few years, this Forum has changed the face of the IPU and ensured that the voices of young MPs are always included in our work. The newly-elected President of the Forum, Ms. Sahar Albazar, will be speaking to you later today, along with the newly-elected members of the Forum's Board from Uzbekistan and Madagascar.

Dear colleagues,

Victor Hugo once said that “nothing in the world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.” I believe that, right now, the time has come to realize the idea of empowering youth and entrenching their rights.

Our planet is at “peak youth”, with half the world's population being under 30. Despite these numbers, young people are severely under-represented in politics. Only 2.6% of the world's parliamentarians are under 30. 37% of chambers of parliament don't have even a single MP under 30. We need transformative change.

All too often, youth participation has been in the streets – or today on social media – rather than in formal bodies. Exclusion not only leads to marginalization and a loss of confidence in our political systems, but it is also an incredible waste of ideas and skills. We have a duty to ensure that the political rights of young people are fulfilled. But going further, it is also an imperative for a healthy democracy, and for us to tackle the global challenges we all face, like achieving the SDGs.

Parliaments are ideally placed to be linchpins for change. As institutions that represent the people, they can bridge youth and their associations to State decision-making. In parliament, a country's laws and budgets can be crafted to meet the needs and expectations of young people. MPs can monitor their government's performance and hold them to account.

Despite these levers of power, one main challenge I know young people face is that they do not feel that parliament is easily accessible to them. Having MPs that they can relate to and that understand their particular needs can make all the difference. This is why one of the best ways to promote youth rights is by increasing the numbers of young MPs in parliament. This fulfilment of their political rights will allow them to better benefit from other social and economic rights.

For many years, the young MPs of the IPU have been devising solutions to empower youth. Their recommendations cover a wide array of subjects. But recently they have narrowed them down to the most critical areas in a new effort to spur action.

We call it the “I Say Yes” campaign. Launched just a couple of months ago, its aim is to help leaders of all ages walk the talk on youth participation.

We call on MPs and key stakeholders, to take one – or more – of the six pledges chosen by young MPs themselves to be most effective to raise youth participation.

The pledges are to:

1. Promote youth quotas;
2. Promote aligning the age of eligibility to hold political office with the voting age;
3. Support youth channels in parliament, such as youth caucuses and committees;
4. Empower young MPs after they are elected to office;

5. Support young aspirants seeking to make it to political office; and finally,
6. Promote the campaign throughout parliament.

By fulfilling these commitments, I have no doubt that we will make tremendous headway in further achieving the rights of young people.

I am extremely heartened that the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Chair of the Uzbekistan Senate and the High Commissioner for Human Rights are among the more than 300 “changemakers” who have joined this campaign so far. I would like to invite all those participating today to join us in this movement, and to “Say yes” to youth in parliament. You can do so with just a few clicks on the IPU “I Say Yes” website.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whether it is by signing up to a campaign for more young people in parliament, or adopting any of the other initiatives being promoted today, we are all aiming for the same objective: to promote and fulfil the rights of young people. John F. Kennedy once said, “If not us, who? If not now, when?” Let this be the moment when we all rise to the occasion to deliver tangible results for young people. Global cooperation is needed, and the IPU stands ready as an unwavering ally in these efforts.

Thank you.