



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Video message by Mr. Martin Chungong Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

42nd ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) General Assembly

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Mr. Speaker,
Distinguished delegates,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the virtual meeting of the 42nd ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) General Assembly. I would like to express my congratulations to AIPA for holding this meeting in a virtual format. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought very many challenges. One of them is how global and regional organizations can continue to function and play their important role in international cooperation, when it is no longer possible to meet in person.

At the IPU, we have managed to hold two major virtual events, a meeting of the IPU Governing Council in November 2020 to elect a new President of the organization, and a full Assembly in May 2021 where the IPU debated the response to the pandemic and adopted a number of resolutions. Like you, we are of course looking forward to the time when we can resume our in-person activities. But like you, we have proved that our organizations are resilient and able to use the current technologies to continue to do their business at times of crisis.

This points to a wider truth that will run through your discussions during this General Assembly. The digital environment is now fully entwined in every sphere of life, including the political, social, economic and cultural domains. Progress towards the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is underpinned by digital technology. Democratic processes are underpinned by digital technology. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure two very fundamental requirements.

The first is inclusion. When some people are connected and others are not, we create a system where opportunities are not equally shared. I am thinking here not only of infrastructure but also educating people in digital literacy from the earliest age. If I may, I would like to underscore that digital literacy is also important for parliamentarians. Parliamentarians need a good basic understanding of the Internet in order to fully grasp the issues that are at stake when we talk of internet governance and the major technological choices that a country makes. I believe parliaments have a responsibility in supporting their parliamentarians in building their knowledge on digital issues.

The second fundamental requirement concerns safety in the digital environment. Here I am thinking naturally of cybersecurity and ensuring that digital infrastructure is protected against criminal activity. I am also mindful of the need to protect people's

fundamental online rights, so that everyone can express their views freely, so that there are clear and strong protections for their personal data, and so on.

At the IPU we are approaching these questions through different channels. I encourage all parliamentarians to engage with the Internet Governance Forum, where the IPU will organize a parliamentary event at its next meeting in Poland in December 2021. I also commend to you the IPU's Centre for Innovation in Parliament, which has become the primary forum for inter-parliamentary cooperation on the effective use of technology, charting the wave of innovation in parliamentary working methods as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and reiterate the IPU's commitment to support parliaments in their efforts to ensure that no-one is left behind in the new digital world.