



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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# 148th IPU Assembly

## Geneva, 23–27 March 2024

### High-level meeting on *The crisis of multilateralism: Root causes and possible solutions*

Monday, 25 March 2024, 11:00 – 13:00

#### Concept note

This special event of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs is in line with the Committee's new mandate (March 2023), which calls for a high-level meeting "on the role of parliaments in multilateralism" to be convened "at the mid-point between consecutive World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament".

All five Speakers' Conferences since 2000 have been dedicated to strengthening the multilateral system of international organizations working for peace and development, including strengthening the parliamentary dimension of the work of the United Nations. With a Sixth World Conference of Speakers planned for August 2025, this high-level meeting will allow for a wide-ranging reflection on the current crisis of multilateralism and contribute to the preparatory process for the Conference.

The high-level meeting will be open exclusively to **Speakers or Deputy Speakers** participating in the 148th IPU Assembly, and senior UN officials and special guests will also be taking part.

In the Declaration of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (Part I, 2020), Speakers reiterated previous calls for a stronger, rules-based multilateral system. In particular, they noted:

*"Common challenges can only be overcome through global responses, coordination and collaboration between all our nations. We therefore reaffirm the key role of multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core... We must continue to review, revitalize and renew multilateralism, so as to ensure that the voices of parliamentarians are heard at the United Nations and other international fora."*

Despite the Speakers' faith in multilateralism, multilateral organizations continue to be seen as unable to cope effectively with global challenges such as the climate emergency, the breakdown of international law, rising inequalities, and a growing number of conflicts with global repercussions. As more people come to distrust the multilateral system's ability to respond to their needs, the very idea of multilateralism is being called into question.

More concretely, the current crisis of the multilateral system is manifested in a variety of ways, including:

- Ineffective implementation of international agreements: many UN-brokered agreements on matters of world peace, environmental sustainability and economic development are not being implemented in whole or in part, with very weak accountability for failure and no authority to enforce compliance.
- Dysfunctional decision-making bodies such as the Security Council (with its frequent political stalemates due to the veto power and its antiquated membership model), the UN Peacebuilding Fund (where governments are often reluctant to invest in strengthening the institution of parliament), or the Executive Boards of the Bretton Woods institutions (with their in-built bias toward developed countries as main contributors).
- Double standards in international law: UN action to counter serious breaches of international law, including human rights violations, is uneven and punishing, reprimands some governments more than others or lets some governments off the hook altogether.

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There are many root causes of this crisis but they can be reduced to two underlying factors. Firstly, a general weakening of democracy around the world, which is sowing distrust in institutions of government at all levels, nationally and globally.

Secondly, the weakening of multilateralism through growing geopolitical and economic tensions linked to globalization. As the global marketplace has become vastly more competitive and the resources to sustain it harder to obtain, international relations have become increasingly perceived as a zero-sum game in which national interests must prevail over shared global goals.

The UN's response to these intersecting problems has been to embark on a series of institutional reforms which, after several years of deliberations, have yet to come to fruition. Member States agreed to a shortlist of key reform issues at the UN 75th Anniversary Summit (September 2020), which were further developed by the UN Secretary-General in his [Our Common Agenda](#) report.

As part of this reform agenda, the vision of a more “networked UN” has been proposed, which would enable non-governmental stakeholders such as civil society, the private sector, academic institutions, and key groups like women and youth to better contribute to decision-making outcomes and support their implementation.

While parliaments are not a “stakeholder” group, their role in influencing the agenda and in implementing United Nations outcomes through their oversight and legislative functions has gained recognition through a variety of [resolutions of the General Assembly](#). At the same time, with the support of the IPU, and particularly its [Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs](#), the global parliamentary community has become more aware of its role in international relations and in UN deliberative processes.

However, much more needs to be done for parliaments to make a deep, long-term impact in terms of making the multilateral system more democratic and more effective in delivering to the people. In particular, the *practical modalities* through which parliaments participate in the work of the United Nations – either through their respective governments or through the IPU – need to be improved both quantitatively and qualitatively. For their part, the Member States of the United Nations need to be more open to the inclusion of parliamentarians in the work of the Organization.

With this context in mind, participants in the high-level meeting will be invited to report on their work since the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and discuss the following questions:

- Given the deep drivers of the multilateral crisis, are institutional reforms of the UN sufficient to fix the multilateral system?
- What other conditions need to be met, in national arenas and globally, to restore trust in the multilateral system?
- What should parliaments be seeking from the current UN reform process?
- How can parliaments contribute to strengthening democracy and international cooperation as key conditions for a stronger multilateral system?