



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Opening of the 148th IPU Assembly

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Madam President,
Honourable Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I salute Dr. Ackson on her accession to the high office of IPU President and significance that her maiden Assembly as President of IPU in Geneva, home of IPU.

It is a joy and a privilege to welcome you to Geneva, home to our Organization and, therefore, a second home to all 46'000 MPs of the world. It is telling that we are meeting in a city known for its significance in mediation and global governance to discuss how to best employ parliamentary diplomacy for peace. I believe our presence and focus send a strong message to the entire international community in Geneva and across the globe: parliamentarians – as representatives of the people – have a critical role to play in international cooperation and peacebuilding, if international cooperation and peacebuilding are to be democratic and inclusive, exactly the two core values embedded in the IPU's motto: *For democracy. For everyone.*

Of course, no one would argue against the fact that formal negotiations of ceasefires, peace treaties, and international covenants are the domain of governments. But peace processes do not end with the signature of treaties. On the contrary, that is where they begin. True peace can only be achieved when declarations and agreements are translated into concrete actions, and parliamentarians are key actors in this process – both nationally and internationally. MPs can take solid steps to advance inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence, and dialogue that can lead to the much-needed reconciliation of the peoples they represent. Furthermore, as the IPU's long history proves, given that formal negotiating mandates do not restrict parliamentarians, they have a degree of flexibility to share messages and establish lines of contact where formal diplomatic ties are restricted or broken.

And that is precisely the point of the IPU: we are here to offer you a platform and support you in your efforts to *build bridges for peace and understanding*, as suggested by the title of our General Debate. Today, you are wearing two hats. You are here both as Members of Parliament and IPU delegates, so you are connected not only to your home country but also to your colleagues from around the world who are sitting next to you. As such, you know that the hopes and aspirations of the people you represent are far more similar than some would have us believe, and that by collaborating, listening to one another, and building trust, you can find proactive steps toward advancing peace and reconciliation.

Hence, I am sure you will be keen to make the most of this Assembly and talk to your colleagues from across political, ideological, religious, and geographical divides, but – most importantly – listen to them. As Epictetus wisely stated, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

Dear friends,

Peace can only be achieved in societies that are rooted in the rule of law and in which historically marginalized groups – such as women, youth, minorities, and people with disabilities – are included in decision-making processes and can aspire to a life full of dignity and socioeconomic opportunity. It is no

accident that so many wars arise in areas where democracy and inclusiveness are severely lacking in some form or another. So, ending cycles of violence and hate by focusing on rights-based and people-centered responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of *all* people is a moral imperative and a practical necessity for peace.

The current global landscape is fraught with complexity. Armed conflicts are on the rise, with human tragedy occurring every minute in Gaza, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, and the Sahel, to cite only a few examples. Recent attacks remind us all of the vulnerability of humanity. Political divides are deepening. Recent coups in Myanmar and Afghanistan have all resulted in the erosion of democracy in these parts of the world. Likewise, the advent of technology and artificial intelligence brings unprecedented challenges to international security. Such a scenario demands action and a recommitment to the power of dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy. And this 148th IPU Assembly brings you the opportunity to do so.

This week, as Madam President pointed out, the IPU's specialized bodies will all meet in person. We are also expecting to adopt important resolutions on the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems, as well as affordable green energy. [The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs will adopt a motion on the much-needed reform of the Security Council]. We will also have meaningful discussions on a host of other issues including the crisis of multilateralism, interfaith dialogue, human and common security, minority rights and youth participation – all of these supported by high-level officials from organizations in International Geneva, who are eager to engage with you.

So, I hope you make the most of this Assembly as you deliberate over the next few days. I hope you share your successes, confront our current challenges in a constructive manner, and forge a path forward that is inclusive, innovative, and infused with the spirit of inter-parliamentary cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Thank you.