



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

New York, 31 August–2 September 2015



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Cover: Group photo of participants at the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament
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Foreword by IPU President, Saber Chowdhury

Our world is at a crossroads. Rarely before have the challenges we face been more acute, never before has the need for us to join forces in solidarity been more critical. Parliamentary leaders from the world over, representing more than 7 billion citizens from all continents, convened at UN Headquarters in New York to underscore their commitment to helping build a safer, fairer and more prosperous world.

2015 has also been a turning point as it has witnessed the emergence of new commitments relating to disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals are the first ever major UN agreement to include specific action on governance. Effective, accountable, representative institutions will indeed be the engines to drive the implementation of the new development package. In order for this to have a meaningful impact and improve the lives of our people, we – parliaments and parliamentarians – need to step up and actively engage in the complex process ahead.

Our World Conference was a unique opportunity to come together as a global parliamentary community, find common ground and provide impetus for action through leadership and bold vision. The time has now come to turn our words into reality.



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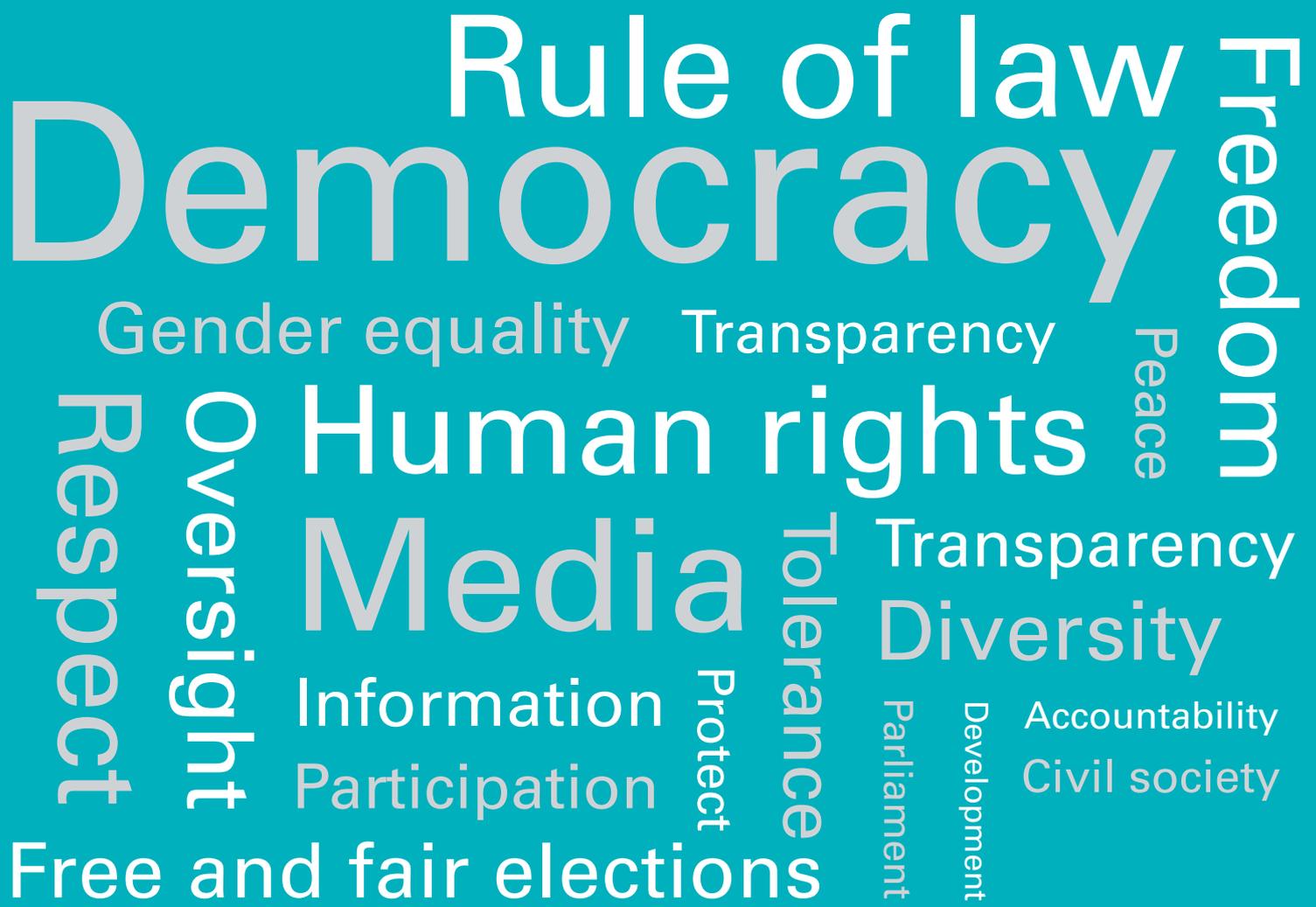
Introduction by IPU Secretary General, Martin Chungong

The Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament took place from 31 August to 2 September 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York. It was convened and chaired by the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Saber H. Chowdhury. The Conference was organized in close cooperation with the United Nations, as part of the series of high-level meetings leading up to the UN Summit on the post-2015 development agenda. It was preceded by the Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament (29–30 August 2015), whose outcome informed the deliberations of the World Conference.

Over 150 parliamentary leaders engaged in a frank and robust debate on the central theme of *Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want*. They examined issues relating to the parliamentary dimension of international cooperation, parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals, challenges facing parliaments today, and mainstreaming gender equality into the work of parliaments.

The Speakers of parliament concluded their World Conference with the adoption of an ambitious political declaration in which they set out their vision of how parliamentary cooperation can help address the major challenges facing the international community today, while better implementing key global commitments and meeting the aspiration by all people to a life of dignity, free from want and fear.

This publication offers insights into the events as they unfolded during the course of the World Conference.



Report from the general debate

The Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament centred around a general debate on the overall theme of *Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want*. It also included two panel discussions, one on parliamentary oversight and another on translating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into action.

The general debate featured over 150 statements by Speakers of Parliament and heads of regional and other parliamentary organizations. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) President, the UN Secretary-General, the President of the UN General Assembly and UNESCO’s Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation delivered opening remarks. The Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UN Women also addressed the general debate.

Speakers offered various perspectives on democracy, the role of parliaments, sustainable development, violence and terrorism, governance and other issues. This report seeks to capture the key messages and recommendations that emerged from the general debate.

Democracy

Many delegates described the situation of democracy and development in their own country or region. Democracy had grown steadily year after year from the 1970s until the first half of the previous decade. In recent years, however, there had regrettably been stagnation and even regression. For a variety of reasons, many aspiring democratic regimes were in danger of foundering or had already done so. All too often, too much emphasis had been placed on holding elections and too little on building lasting democratic institutions, embracing respect for differences, promoting dialogue and seeking the peaceful

resolution of conflicts. Furthermore, some democratically elected leaders had undermined democracy from within by using their newly won authority to give themselves almost unlimited powers. Democracy must never be a game of winner-takes-all.

Well-established democracies had to do their utmost to support ongoing democratic development in nascent and struggling democracies. In particular, they must encourage fragile States to take leadership of their processes and to commit to the future of their citizens. That must not take the form of demanding complete

compliance with standards imposed from outside regardless of countries' traditions or capacity to implement them. Democracy is government by the people and for the people; it has to be something experienced in people's everyday life. Democracy is a process that requires continuous care with respect for the circumstances and specificities of each society. Parliaments must review national constitutions to ensure that they were in line with modern society's needs and with international standards. Electoral laws had to be reviewed as necessary to facilitate free participation in electoral processes and reflect the will of the people.

One essential component of democracy was the inclusion of civil society. In certain models of direct democracy, for example, civil society organizations or even simple groupings of individuals are entitled to make any topic the subject of a referendum. This leads to a distinct feeling of citizen ownership of the democracy so that people know that they are not just irrelevant bystanders in the process of government; they can help shape public policy and laws. Important, too, is the annual publication by some governments of their successes and failures, which parliament can debate, offer criticisms or suggestions and carry out audits.

Several Speakers described the advent or return of democracy in their countries after a period of authoritarian rule. This entailed restoring the principle of the separation of powers and (re-) establishment of respect for human rights and the rule of law. Often it would also involve training people to assume parliamentary responsibilities and the preparation of action plans for the future.

Democracy must be promoted by ensuring that it was participatory and inclusive, making a difference to the lives of vulnerable sections of society. In that context, it was encouraging that one of the SDGs sought to provide access to justice for all and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

However, it could be said that there were certain governments that seemed to favour democracy for their own people only, supporting dictatorships and despotic regimes outside their borders.

The practice of warmongering under the pretext of expanding democracy had resulted in attempts by some governments to enforce democracy in other countries with bombs and machine guns. Building democracy required patience and perseverance: without a strong foundation, the transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy had left a power vacuum that brought about unstable conditions in certain parts of the world.

Role of parliaments

In a modern society, the ultimate responsibility to protect democracy lay with parliament, which must lead the way in creating open and transparent societies founded on the rule of law. Parliament must ensure that appropriate structures were in place to prevent the abuse of power and its ensuing corruption. It must ensure that there was a clear division of power between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.

In some countries, people were losing trust in the ability of the government to solve intractable problems, such as long-term unemployment or persistent violence. In some cases, people



A ballot box is emptied inside the Sudanese parliament as votes are counted to elect a Speaker.
© AFP/Ashraf Shazly, 2010

were also losing confidence in parliament's ability to oversee the executive.

It was vitally important to create mechanisms that secured the integrity of parliamentarians and the parliaments to which they belonged. With parliament being fundamentally about debate, if those systems were perceived as not working well, democratic rights and freedoms would come under threat. Safeguarding the rights of the opposition meant safeguarding the principle of agreeing not to agree, and creating a platform for discussion within a peaceful framework. It was those conditions that created trust between the people and their elected governing institutions, ensuring the broad societal participation that was so crucial for vibrant democracies.

Heeding the choice of the people and meeting their expectations was the common responsibility of parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries. Some Speakers stressed their parliament's readiness to work with those of other countries and international parliamentary organizations to make a more robust contribution to building a better world. Parliamentarians owed that to their constituents. In particular, parliamentarians had a duty to shoulder the heavy burden, working together to put the SDGs into practice, with a view to building the world that people want. Parliaments had a responsibility and a duty, too, to enact specific legislation and create an enabling environment to protect the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, recognizing the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all citizens, without distinction. Parliaments needed to provide opportunities for the debate and formulation of policies and enactment of legislation with a view to ensuring sustainable development.

The tasks of parliamentarians included promoting democratic reform in countries, ensuring a secure and just world, eradicating religious extremism, terrorism and violence, reinforcing law and governance, and promoting tolerance and intercultural/interfaith dialogue. Parliamentarians had a responsibility, too, to be constantly alert to the danger of compromising democracy in the pursuit of prosperity. That would be at least part of parliamentarians' contribution to the implementation of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

They also had a role to play in ensuring gender equality. There could be no sustainable development without gender equality and the empowerment of women. Several Speakers described the progress of gender equality in their country, often with specific reference to the growing number of women in the national parliament. Various suggestions were made for improving the situation still further, such as reviewing national objectives and legal frameworks to ensure that they responded to the needs of both men and women; adopting affirmative measures; supporting women's parliamentary caucuses; making parliamentary bodies gender-sensitive; and working to dismantle religious and cultural barriers to gender equality. Above all, parliamentarians had a duty to exercise their oversight power in order to hold governments to account for gender equality. They should also monitor the efforts of the government to craft legislation addressing violence against women: there could be no true equality between men and women without an end to gender-based violence.

A parliament's strategic plan should include initiatives to support and encourage youth participation and make the institution more open and accessible to young people and youth organizations. These initiatives should encourage them to turn away from violence and in the process redress the growing disconnect between politics and the people, especially young people. Many of today's youth were uncomfortable with decisions made on their behalf, in which they had little or no say, with policies and programmes imposed and promoted by leaders who were more concerned about capital accumulation than about capacity-building, profit rather than peoples' empowerment, with corporate giants that grew richer while the poverty gap widened in the developing world. The holding of open days, school visits, invitations to attend committee hearings and plenary sessions, as well as the hosting of national Youth Parliaments, were positive ways to encourage youth re-engagement.

Parliaments also had an important role to play in international relations, not only in ratifying international agreements made by governments, but also in consolidating the legal order that protected development for democracy, and thereby in achieving the objective of peace and sustainable development.

Several Speakers stressed the important role that parliaments played in approving or rejecting military budgets, one noting that if even one tenth of the budget spent on occupying Iraq and Afghanistan had instead been dedicated to development and prosperity, there would likely no longer be insecurity and terrorism in those countries. After the end of the Cold War, the international community had expected a comprehensive peace but instead there had been eruptions of local and ethnic tensions and violence, with such new conflicts constantly increasing military expenditures. Parliaments had a duty to stand together to fight the threats facing the international community, countering them with dialogue and cooperation.

From the MDGs to the SDGs

Several Speakers described the achievements of their countries in the context of the MDGs. There had been both successes and failures. The present time provided an opportunity to draw from the lessons learned from the MDGs, by observing what had succeeded and what had not, and working out how to do better in the future. Despite their limitations, the MDGs had been successful in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty; they had reduced child and maternal mortality rates significantly and had increased the number of children going to school in developing regions. But the job was far from done. The SDGs would take over in leading the way towards a more united, human-rights-based, just and environmentally sustainable world.

Agreement on the SDGs was an ambitious starting point that the world undoubtedly needed. But the key to success in such a great endeavour would be to ensure unwavering commitment to the goals throughout the process. It was in that area that parliaments could play a major role, in passing legislation, making the required budget allocations and holding governments to account. Parliamentarians were also key actors in shaping

public opinion. Active, open and inclusive public discussion on the importance of the development agenda would help create the right climate for implementation. Indeed, that was a key element in any democratic process for the common good.

The world had changed dramatically since the adoption of the MDGs 15 years earlier. Countries were more connected than ever before, despite some claims that globalization benefited only the strong. It was true that the results of the MDGs had been largely uneven. Climate change heightened the risk of conflict among them, with its threat of water shortages, land loss and drought. The issue of refugees had become geographically ever wider. National decisions had an international impact, which meant that fair and widely applicable sustainable development policies must be adopted.

A global common approach to sustainability demanded that developed countries, which bore the historical responsibility for climate change and ecological degradation, and had better financial and technological resources, must take practical steps to lead the process. The onus of global sustainability could not be placed on developing countries alone. Therefore, a strong global partnership was needed to support the efforts of developing countries in the spirit of the whole world as a global village and, like the interdependence within a village, all must share the responsibility according to individual capacity and capability.

As difficult as it might appear psychologically, in the long run countries had to be able to break free from a pure growth-based approach in measuring progress. The shift had to be towards more well-being and happiness for humankind as a whole. There would undoubtedly be a need for greater solidarity to end poverty and for innovative solutions to achieve sustainable management of the world's natural resources.

Parliamentarians were faced with many challenges in terms of their institutional effectiveness as representatives of the people. Over and above the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, the Conference theme drew its inspiration from the broad consensus that the world and its people were faced with myriad problems and challenges in their quest to live in peace, free from the scourges of war and conflict, violence in all its forms, extreme poverty and hunger, unemployment, disease, climate change, and the list continues.

Politicians should not underestimate their ability to positively influence society. Their appeal to the more affluent sectors of society to surrender certain privileges, such as subsidies on basic amenities like water or gas, could lead to a greater sense of responsibility-sharing and solidarity with the less affluent sectors. At the international level, genuine relations of cooperation and solidarity between the developed and the developing countries were of fundamental importance.

There was thus a need for a profound transformation in how the world operates. In particular, there would be challenges in translating the SDGs into enforceable laws, including identifying the necessary financial resources for their implementation, which was an area where parliamentarians had a duty to press the government to allocate sufficient funds. It would

also take time to build national ownership of the SDGs by the engagement of parliamentarians with their constituents, and to tailor the global goals to specific national circumstances, including the drawing up of national sustainable development plans. Those challenges at the same time would provide a roadmap for each country to follow. Guidance and assistance from the IPU would be welcome.

Speakers from a number of small island developing States (SIDS) expressed appreciation for the inclusion in the sustainable development agenda of their particular concerns, namely climate change, global warming, and the resultant sea-level rise. Some saw the risks of climate change as being as grave as the recent Ebola crisis, and called for the same level of urgent attention to the problem. All hoped for concrete and meaningful progress as the outcome of the climate change Conference in Paris at the end of the year.

Ultimately, people needed to strike a balance between need and greed. A world without poverty or hunger is safer, better and fairer. In sustainable development, humans and nature coexist in productive harmony. The question must be asked whether the future was sustainable using the present development model. In many ways, modern technology owed an apology to ecology.

Speakers agreed that every country faced specific challenges on the way to achieving sustainable development, and might follow different approaches, visions, models and tools, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities. Some suggested that no sovereign country should be subjected to external oversight mechanisms or benchmarks with regard to progress on these goals. Others, however, pointed to the need to establish a robust mechanism to monitor responsibility and accountability, together with efficient measurement of the progress made in achieving the objectives of the new agenda.

Peace and security were components of sustainable development, and it had to be recognized that one of the main threats to sustainable development was the rise of terrorism and extremism.

Violence and terrorism

In many parts of the world, armed force seemed to have become the instrument of solving disputes, which ran completely counter to sustainable development. There was a disconnect between the brutal reality on the ground and people's lofty aspirations to bring about a world where peace reigns.

Some Speakers asserted that the terrorism perpetrated against their countries was being financed and encouraged, officially or unofficially, by the authorities of other countries, in order to topple the government or to achieve some other perfidious aim. However, such sponsors of remote-controlled terrorism were now realizing, too late, that they had unleashed a monster that could turn against them too. In other cases, such as the atrocities in Tunisia earlier in 2015, terrorists had deliberately targeted foreigners in order to undermine the economy and sow discord between the victims' home countries and the country



Around 200 refugees and migrants arrive in a fishing boat on the Greek island of Lesbos after crossing the Aegean sea from Turkey. © SOOC/Nick Paleologos, 2015

where the attack took place. Other Speakers saw the sanctions imposed on their country as a form of economic terrorism, which might in turn lead disaffected youth, disenchanted by big-power politics, to head down the path of violence and terrorism.

There could be no peace, development or democracy in a world where terrorism, war and chaos prevailed. Whenever wars were launched, wherever terrorism was rampant and chaos reigned, the people mourned their loss of the gains they had achieved over years and decades.

Terrorism could be effectively brought under control only by not repeating the mistakes of the past. In the context of the immediate present, there was a need for a clear statement that the enemy was terror, not Islam. Islamophobia was as abhorrent and dangerous as anti-Semitism or racism and must be suppressed by all legal means. Islam must be perceived, along with all other religions, cultures and civilizations, as a precious gift of humankind. Islamic leaders, however, did have a role to play in speaking out against all forms of violence perpetrated in the name of religion.

It was suggested that the United Nations might assist in the struggle against violence and terrorism by holding an international conference to consider those scourges in all aspects, including the root causes and financing of terrorism. It was also important for parliaments to share information and enhance cooperation with a view to combating terrorism.

Violence and war resulted in the chaos of refugees fleeing to safety. In turn, that led to a rise in human trafficking, deaths along the journey, and a growing problem in the destination countries of how to absorb such a human flood. The inflow of refugees and migrants to Europe was a reminder that we do not live in isolation, and that State borders and frontiers between continents cannot, and should not, prevent people

from escaping violence and persecution. Numerous statements and reactions showed the need for a coordinated international response. At the same time, in practice, political will for greater international solidarity and more responsibility-sharing seemed to be dangerously lacking.

But the outcome would be disastrous if countries did not work together. Parliamentarians must show more initiative, they must lead by example. They must tell governments to stop defending their own narrow interests and show greater solidarity.

As both a partial cause and effect of the migrant crisis, there had been a dramatic rise of intolerance, hatred and extremism: grave dangers for democratic institutions and peaceful co-existence. As a counter-measure, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) had launched the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance. That initiative should be extended beyond the European continent with all parliaments joining a network – for instance, within the framework of the IPU – to create one large movement, linking up with civil society, religious bodies and others to say “No” to hate and intolerance.

Good governance at the national and international levels

While the inclusion in the SDGs of priority areas such as energy, climate change, food security, water and sanitation, gender equality, reproductive health and rights was welcome, many Speakers felt that in order to successfully improve all of those areas, good governance was the best tool at hand. It was noted that the current draft of the SDGs, especially Goal 16, contained strong references to governance. Good governance was both an enabler and a driver of development. Inclusive participation, together with good governance, would promote peace and sustainable development.



The paradox of our times: we hail democracy's victory while lamenting that parliament – the central institution of democracy – faces a crisis of legitimacy. With low trust in politicians, parliaments everywhere are looking for new ways to engage the public in political decision-making. © Reuters/N. Doce, 2012.

No country was immune from global challenges or could deal with them on its own. Countries should abandon zero-sum thinking, embrace a new approach of win-win cooperation, and together build a global community with a shared future. They should accommodate the interests of others while pursuing their own and promote the common development of all countries while seeking their own.

Countries, irrespective of their size, strength and wealth, were all equal members of the international community, called upon to abide by international law and universally recognized norms governing international relations, to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs, to seek peaceful settlement of differences through dialogue and to uphold international equality and justice.

Many Speakers commented on the complementary roles of the IPU and the United Nations. The latter was seen as the cornerstone of multilateralism and global cooperation, and the IPU was playing an important role in terms of developing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations. A new agreement on cooperation between the two bodies was being prepared, and it was to be hoped that the United Nations-IPU partnership would be further enhanced and placed on a stronger footing. This partnership was particularly relevant in the context of implementation of the major international commitments of 2015: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the post-2015 development agenda with its SDGs, and the Climate Change Agreement hoped for in December 2015. Those interlocking and mutually reinforcing processes, coupled with respective means of implementation, were critical for the future the people want.

Several Speakers also called for reform in the way that the Security Council operated, and more generally for greater accountability and transparency in the work of the United Nations.

Declaration

Many Speakers praised the final Declaration of the Conference – adopted by acclamation – as a document that would provide substantive policy guidance to parliaments and the IPU for the years to come.

It was agreed that to live in a world of peace, democracy, prosperity and happiness was the legitimate desire of each and every person on the planet. To translate such aspiration into reality, members of parliaments had to fulfil their responsibility as the highest representatives of the people. Parliamentary leaders were confident that the Conference Declaration would reflect the commitment of parliaments and parliamentarians to place democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development, and help build the world the people want.

Declaration

Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want

1. We live in extraordinary times. We need equally extraordinary efforts to build a world where every man, woman and child is safe from war and conflict, free from poverty and hunger, where they are able to meet their needs and realize their human potential while preserving our planet for future generations, and where their rights, freedoms and dignity are fully respected.
2. Parliament is the central institution of democracy through which the will of the people is expressed. We, the Speakers of the world's parliaments, have convened at the United Nations in New York to give voice to their concerns and demonstrate our resolve to play our part in meeting the global challenges before us.
3. As we adopt this Declaration we are mindful of the unique responsibilities and constitutional mandates of our parliaments to make the laws that implement international agreements and to hold governments and international institutions to account for their full realization. Cognizant of our diverse traditions and unique parliamentary histories and practices, it is our ambition to provide a concrete democratic dimension to collective efforts aimed at creating a better world.
7. Our parliaments will do their utmost to enhance effective cooperation and support implementation of all relevant UN resolutions and international conventions and agreements to combat terrorism and contribute to the adoption of a coherent security policy at the international level. We pay tribute to the innocent victims of barbaric terrorist acts throughout the world and express our solidarity with them.
8. Much more needs to be and can be done to prevent and reduce the risk of violence. We call for greater efforts to achieve a nuclear weapons-free world. We want to see a real reduction in the proliferation of all weapons. We call for urgent action, including robust legislation, to tackle new security threats and to combat organized crime linked to human trafficking, drugs and the illegal arms trade, kidnappings and extortion, and associated money laundering and corruption.
9. Millions of women and girls in every region of the world are subjected to all forms of violence, including physical, sexual and domestic violence, every day. We call on all countries to prioritize the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence now. There is an equally urgent need to put an end to widespread hatred and discrimination in all forms. We urge all countries to foster intercultural dialogue and to focus on promoting and tolerant and inclusive societies where people are respectful of each other's culture, religion and traditions. This should not run counter to efforts aimed at combating gender-based discrimination.

Our world today

4. In spite of progress in the areas of democracy, peace and development, we continue to live in an unstable world. War and conflict, often characterized by extreme brutality, are a daily reality in many places. Millions of people, primarily women and children die, are injured and displaced or forced to flee in dramatic conditions. In some regions of the world, we still witness democratic backsliding.
5. Peace and security are prerequisites for democracy and sustainable development. We call for much greater efforts to be deployed in solving conflicts through political dialogue and negotiations, with full respect for international law and by addressing the root causes of the conflict. We offer to place more emphasis on parliamentary diplomacy, which has demonstrated its ability to provide impetus to efforts aimed at resolving differences and conflicts.
6. We witness horrendous terrorist acts in every part of the globe. New terrorist groups are emerging with substantial resources at their disposal. Unfortunately, many of these terrorist acts are perpetrated by fundamentalist groups purporting to act in the name of religion. We condemn all forms and manifestations of terrorism, irrespective of their perpetrators and motives, as well as radicalization, violent extremism and their means of financing.
10. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, is a fixture of today's world. People can and will move to other places in search of a better life. When they are forced to do so because their life is under threat the international community has an obligation to provide support. We are appalled at the countless human tragedies unfolding as people flee wars, conflict, natural and human disasters. We call on all States to protect refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants and to help build stable and prosperous societies in their countries of origin. In this context, it is important to work together to curb human smuggling and trafficking, as well as to strengthen cooperation to address the root causes of migration.
11. Despite global advances in technology, health, knowledge and material wealth, long-standing economic and social disparities are increasing. There are vast inequalities in terms of income and living conditions in the world and billions of people are living in poverty, which erodes the social contract that is essential for democratic life and human progress everywhere. We are witnessing a steady degradation of

our environment and climate change is today a reality. We urge our countries to reach agreements that take fully into account the Rio principles, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

12. These agreements should ensure a shared prosperity while protecting our environment and effectively addressing climate change. They should focus on both adaptation and mitigation and be coupled with sufficient resources for effective implementation. Our parliaments stand ready to support the implementation of these agreements, as we do with respect to the commitments on disaster risk reduction and promoting a culture of prevention and risk resilience.
13. The Internet is strongly influencing our world, spurring innovation and communication within and between countries. It is also a vital tool to foster citizens' participation in the democratic process. Cooperation between all stakeholders – Internet users, the private sector, civil society, the technological community, governments and international organizations – has helped foster an online environment in which all societies stand to benefit. However, too many people, especially women, still lack access to the Internet and more must be done to bridge the digital divide and ensure our citizens are able to harness the benefits of connectivity. We must also strive to ensure that rights are respected on the Internet and that it remains a space for debate and discussion, free from excessive commercialization and undue regulations aimed at limiting fundamental freedoms agreed internationally.
14. In all of this, we need to rededicate ourselves to the rule of law. Our parliaments should assist in ensuring that the rule of law is upheld and all have equal access to justice. We call for greater commitment to international law and propose to pay particular attention to respect for human rights and international humanitarian law while supporting international justice mechanisms and efforts to end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes.

Democracy

15. We reaffirm the principles of the Universal Declaration on Democracy. In this sense, our parliaments are sovereign and independent national institutions. They are marked by the history and cultural heritage of our countries and each one is different. Yet, they share the same ambition to ensure that the will of the people forms the basis of government. Participation in political life and public decision-making is an entitlement and is crucial to development. When people are left voiceless or excluded, their well-being is undermined and democracy is left wanting.
16. We call for greater efforts to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls with a view to achieving their empowerment and making gender equality a reality. Development of our societies and economies hinges on the enjoyment, by women and men, girls and boys, of full and equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. We

must rededicate ourselves to the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2030. We deplore the excruciatingly slow progress in securing a greater presence of women in parliament and commit to redoubling our efforts to reach, as a global average, the internationally agreed target of 30 per cent of women members in parliament by 2020.

17. There is an apparent disconnect between the way we do politics and the way people live today. The connectivity and immediacy that characterize their lives seem far removed from national political processes. Young people in particular are calling for greater engagement, openness, transparency, accountability and effectiveness in politics. We must be ambitious and halt the tide of young people opting out of civil society and democratic institutions; we must better harness their energy and creativity in the service of communities and societies as a whole. We have seen how young people have been at the forefront of many pro-democracy movements.
18. We pledge to do our utmost to make politics genuinely open to young people and to facilitate their election to parliament in greater numbers. We also pledge to address youth marginalization by engaging youth in politics and facilitating their access to education throughout their lifetime and to the job market. These may prove to be effective ways of also preventing them from turning to violence and conflict and from being recruited by terrorist groups.
19. Minorities and indigenous peoples are the most vulnerable members of many of our societies and remain excluded from making decisions that affect their lives and the future of our countries. We affirm that they have an inalienable right to full and equal membership of each of our nations, which has to be translated into public policies that are sensitive to their situation, needs, and aspirations and accompanied by sufficient resources. We call for measures to be taken to ensure their effective participation at all levels of public life.
20. We recognize the multiple challenges facing many of our parliaments today. We are concerned by public scepticism and a disconnect with politics, an unequal power relationship with the executive, difficulties in influencing decisions that are increasingly taken in international forums or outside government, and limited means at our disposal to increase institutional capacity in parliament. Supporting the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, we commit to working to tackle these challenges, respecting the role of traditional media, making greater use of social media and modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), and rendering our parliaments fit for purpose for the 21st century.
21. We will do our utmost to bring parliament closer to the people and we renew our pledge to make our parliaments ever more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, enabling the diverse components of society to participate in politics. To this end, we

reiterate the importance of free and fair elections held at regular intervals, on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot. We also reiterate the importance of creating and maintaining, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment for civil society. We recognize the progress that is being made by many parliaments towards democratization, as well as the setbacks experienced in several other countries, and we commit to continuing to assist each other in further promoting parliamentary democracy. We commend the recently adopted Common Principles for Support to Parliaments and recommend that all parliaments and relevant organizations endorse and be guided by them.

22. We encourage the constitutional and institutional reforms under way in countries in transition to democracy. We underscore the importance of providing political and economic support to these countries in order to ensure that democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and social justice take root in a sustainable manner. Supporting economic development is indispensable for fledgling democracies to succeed, including through the conversion of these countries' debts into investments.

Sustainable development

23. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided a welcome focus for global efforts to improve peoples' lives. However, progress has been uneven between regions and countries and wide gaps remain. Some countries have reached many of the goals while others have for a variety of reasons fallen short of the targets. Many peoples' lives have been saved and improved, data has been collected, techniques and tools developed and many important lessons learned. Today, the global community is poised to launch a post-2015 development agenda that is broader in scope and that builds on the experience of the MDGs, tackling both poverty eradication and sustainable development, and applied universally to all countries.

24. We welcome the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that has emerged with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Poverty eradication is the overarching objective of this new agenda, alongside the promotion of economic, social and environmental development. These objectives can only be achieved by changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, building resilient infrastructure, fostering innovation, protecting and better managing natural resources, as well as revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development.

25. We applaud the ambition of this agenda to be transformative and leave no one behind, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Indeed, to be successful, sustainable development has to place human beings at the centre of decisions. It has to aim at achieving their well-being with full respect for environmental limitations. It needs to be owned by the people and it requires their full participation. People are individuals endowed with rights and responsibilities towards each other and towards the environment. We must all invest in them as our most important resource.

26. We welcome the goal and call for greater efforts to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, as well as the goal to address inequalities. We applaud the inclusion of a goal calling for urgent action against climate change that also encompasses disaster risk reduction. We welcome the broad-based goal on the means of implementation – finance, trade, technology, capacity building and systemic reforms – that must be mobilized in support of the new agenda.

27. We commend the inclusion of a goal to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Good governance at all levels is an enabler of development and an objective in its own right for all countries. We commit to reach this goal in our countries and in our parliaments. In the process, parliaments will need to enhance their ability and capacity to ensure accountability for results, including in terms of promoting greater financial responsibility and transparency.

28. While governments are finalizing the new agreements on sustainable development, financing for development, climate change and disaster risk reduction, we underscore the importance of achieving one harmonious global agenda. It is fundamental to the success of the endeavour. Without it we will not be able to achieve coherence and complementarity among the many actors who will be called upon to take part in the implementation process at the local, national and global levels or guarantee the most optimal use of available resources.

29. We recognize the important responsibilities that are incumbent on parliaments to ensure implementation of the new SDGs. As Speakers, we are ready to do everything in our power to facilitate the consideration of relevant legislation and allocation of budgetary resources, and to hold governments accountable for the attainment of the goals. We will draw from a vast catalogue of actions to help build public awareness and national ownership, strengthen coherence within and between national and local administration and parliament, facilitate citizen involvement and evaluate and report on progress.

International cooperation

30. We are convinced that the United Nations must remain the cornerstone of global cooperation and we take this opportunity to renew our solemn pledge in support of the organization as it celebrates its 70th anniversary and the victory of the world over fascism and Nazism. The United Nations embodies the ardent hope of people around the world for peace and development. Its 70th anniversary therefore provides an important opportunity for the international community to reflect on its history, look ahead to the future and move forward, in order to turn the vision of the UN Charter into reality.
31. We call on UN Member States to equip their organization for the challenges of the 21st century. We commend the many reforms that have taken place over the past decade. Important challenges remain, however, that require urgent action. We remain concerned over the ability of the Security Council to better deliver on its primary responsibilities of maintaining international peace and security under the UN Charter. We believe that the effectiveness of the Security Council can only be improved through urgent reform to reflect contemporary global realities.
32. Fifteen years ago, our First Speakers' Conference took place on the eve of the Millennium Summit. On that occasion we presented our vision for providing a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation. We take pride in the considerable progress that has been achieved since then; clearly, there is today growing interaction between the United Nations and the world of parliaments.
33. We remain convinced that parliaments can do more to help bridge the democracy gap in international relations and secure global democratic accountability for the common good. We reiterate the recommendations we formulated at our conferences in 2005 and 2010. We regard the post-2015 development agenda as a unique opportunity to enhance substantially the cooperation between parliaments and the United Nations. We encourage UN Member States to set out an ambitious vision for this cooperation in the final documents.
34. We reiterate that our cooperation must be firmly rooted in the work we carry out in our national parliaments, much of which relates to ensuring accountability. Our parliaments must be more active in international affairs by contributing to and monitoring international negotiations, overseeing the enforcement of agreements that have been reached by governments and ensuring national compliance with international law. Similarly, parliaments must be more vigilant in scrutinizing the activities of international organizations and providing input into their deliberations.
35. We take pride in our organization – the Inter-Parliamentary Union. We reiterate that, as the world organization of parliaments, the IPU is the international body best suited to help build the relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. We have confidence in the IPU, which is playing this role increasingly. We recommend that its capacity be strengthened to cope with the substantial responsibilities that come with the post-2015 development agenda.
36. We encourage the IPU and the United Nations to continue to expand their cooperation, particularly in implementing the agreed Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the post-2015 development agenda to be adopted in September 2015 and the Climate Change Agreement to be concluded in December 2015. These interlocking and mutually reinforcing processes, coupled with respective means of implementation, are critical for the future the people want. We express the hope that both organizations can conclude a new cooperation agreement that reflects the gains that have been made since our first conference and provides a firm footing for our future work together.
37. We remain optimistic about the road ahead. The negotiations to secure agreement on a new development agenda are ample proof of a shared global commitment to address today's global challenges. Here is a unique opportunity for all of us to work together. We will support strongly in each of our countries the necessary action by all relevant authorities to establish mechanisms for tracking and monitoring progress and we call on the IPU to facilitate the achievement of this objective and ensure reporting.
38. We, in our parliaments, will do our part by placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development for the world the people want.

Panel reports

“Parliamentary oversight: Challenges and opportunities”

The panel was moderated by Prof. Robert Nakamura of the University at Albany, State University of New York and featured the Speakers of the Parliaments of Barbados, Belgium, Chile, Indonesia, Kenya and the United Kingdom.

The panel allowed participants to exchange experiences, drawing on their own knowledge of oversight in their individual systems. The discussion would contribute to the second IPU–UNDP *Global Parliamentary Report on Parliament’s power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives*.

The panel and audience discussants touched upon many of the different dimensions of oversight – probity, remaining faithful to the intent of the law, equity (distributional fairness), efficiency and effectiveness and adequacy.

In opening statements on the role of the Speaker of Parliament in oversight, it was noted that in the United Kingdom the Speaker was a “referee” whose role was to ensure a level playing field for all parties and members. The Speaker has powers to shape what is discussed by controlling access to the floor and by ruling on member requests to put urgent questions to ministers or to suspend regular business for urgent considerations. Similarly, in Kenya, the Speaker grants members permission to make personal statements, brings public petitions to the House, and decides on requests for emergency debates.

It is the right, role and responsibility of parliament to hold government to account. However, parliament’s oversight role varies from country to country. In Belgium, the Senate plays a role in monitoring the impact of federal policies on the regional authorities, linguistic groups, women and other constituents. In Barbados, the Senate has limited oversight powers and capacity, as this role is performed principally by the House of Assembly. In Indonesia, the political culture tends to encourage parties that have competed in

presidential elections to approach decisions in a non-adversarial, consensus-building way and to avoid confrontation.

Differences in political systems also account for the varying oversight powers and arrangements. Common to many countries with presidential forms of government, the parliament in Chile has the power to impeach ministers; in practice this power is more widely used when parliament is dominated by opponents of the President. In Trinidad and Tobago, ministers can be members of the same committees that oversee the government, limiting their effectiveness, while in Kenya – where ministers cannot be members of parliament – a procedure has been devised for ministers to come before committees for weekly hearings.

The challenges to effective oversight are numerous. The poor image of parliament in the public eye acts as a constraint, since a lack of public confidence can undermine parliament’s legitimacy to carry out its basic functions. Many parliaments are using methods such as codes of conduct for members that are intended to enhance public confidence.

Relations with the executive can be problematic. There may be difficulties in obtaining appropriate and timely information from government or in ensuring ministers appear in parliament to answer questions. In some parliaments the opposite is true, notably in Small Island Developing States, where the presence of a large number of ministers limits parliament’s ability to exercise oversight. The executive may sometimes seek to ignore the findings of parliamentary oversight committees, or demonstrate a basic mistrust of parliamentary motivations and competence in its oversight role.

A shortage of time and limited staff support are common issues, as oversight of the effectiveness and efficiency of



Participants at the panel on parliamentary oversight.
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Delegation of Bhutan,
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complex budgetary and policy matters requires expertise that is often unavailable to parliament.

Participants underlined the frequent gap between the existence of parliament's oversight powers and their use and effectiveness in practice. Parliaments often have real powers but may not use them to the fullest extent. Ministerial question time often becomes a political theatre rather than a meaningful exchange of information. Oversight tools may be misused, for example to gain visibility or for personal advantage, or to prevent ministers from doing their job. The debilitating use of oversight tools can damage democracy.

Ultimately, much depends on the vigilance and enthusiasm of individual members of parliament to carry out their oversight role. There is a balance to be struck between members' representative roles as advocates for constituents and collective oversight concerns about equity and efficiency. Members have competing incentives to serve their constituents, their party and the institution of parliament. It was pointed out that in order to exercise oversight, members need to have a certain independence of spirit and political will.

There was broad agreement on the need to involve the public more closely in oversight activities, but an acknowledgement that public participation remains underdeveloped in most parliaments.

Many examples of good practice were shared. Pakistan's Public Accounts Committee has recovered US\$ 200 million through investigations into misappropriations. It is very common for public accounts committees to be chaired by a member of the opposition, and this has been found to be effective.

The United Kingdom House of Commons has dealt with the problems that stem from committee chairs being picked by majority party whips, which tended to limit their ability to be critical of the government. Committee chairs and members are now elected by secret ballot from among all members of parliament, enhancing their legitimacy and independence. Several members of the audience expressed their interest in such a mechanism.

There have been some positive outcomes from India's Assurances Committee, which keeps track of commitments made by ministers during questioning and follows up subsequently to see if the executive has kept its word. Similar mechanisms have been adopted in Bangladesh and Kenya.

Efforts are being made to improve the reputation of parliaments by removing them from decisions that directly benefit members. Members' salaries and benefits in the United Kingdom are set by an independent commission, and Kenya has adopted a similar mechanism. Once again, others in the audience expressed an interest in that practice.

The representative of Barbados invited the IPU to develop benchmarks for effective parliamentary oversight. A number of participants supported the proposal, arguing that while all parliaments have their own systems, the existence of a set of neutral benchmarks would allow parliaments to measure themselves against international good practice.

“Translating the SDGs into action”

This panel was moderated by the President of the IPU and featured the Speakers of Parliament from El Salvador, Germany, Jordan, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania and Viet Nam, as well as the President of the Latin American Parliament and the Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign.

The panel was organized in two parts, each addressing a cluster of issues. The first part focused on the relationship between parliaments and citizens and how it can help build national ownership of the goals while the second considered the institutional mechanisms for parliaments to mainstream the goals and track progress.

The following salient points emerged from the discussion:

National ownership is key to implementation of the goals. It is a process that must involve all sectors of society at all levels, from local to national. In its deepest sense, national ownership comes from the people, not just from the institution of government. The extent to which people understand and believe in the goals will be key to national ownership.

It is important for people to see the goals as their own, and not as an agenda handed down to them from the government or the United Nations. Parliaments should not attempt “to teach” the goals to the people but rather help translate the language of the goals into people’s daily concerns. In their interaction with constituents, members of parliament should focus more on the principles and ideals that are embedded in the goals, all of which were designed from the start to be “people-centred”.

Parliaments have a key role to play in monitoring progress on the goals. Reliable data is critical to monitoring, particularly when it comes directly from citizens. Generally, citizens do not think of success in terms of percentages or other technical measurements. Their monitoring of the goals tends to be

based on first-hand impressions of whether public services are improving, job opportunities are expanding, the environment is healthier, to name a few.

Parliaments should ensure that monitoring of progress captures both the quantitative and qualitative aspects. For example, more teachers do not necessarily lead to better education if the teachers are not well trained. What matters in implementation, as far as people are concerned, is the actual impact of public policy on their lives.

Another way in which citizens can help monitor the goals is by participating in the implementation of government-sponsored programmes. The practice of allowing citizens to participate in the delivery of government services is a promising one. Parliaments can support this practice through legislation that requires the government to include communities in the design, delivery and assessment of public services.

Each country will need a sustainable development plan to apply the global goals to the national context. In many countries, parliaments are not able to participate in the crafting of the national plan because of a lack of capacities or legal authority. As a result, the executive branch is often in control of the process. This need not be the case in all instances, however. Several parliaments around the world do have the authority to contribute to the national plan and to demand regular progress reports through one or more committees.

A major hurdle regarding the institutionalization of the SDGs in parliament is the high turnover of MPs. The current generation of MPs will likely be replaced more than once over the next 15 years. One way to address this problem is by training the permanent staff of parliaments as well as strengthening support structures, such as the Office of the Clerk that will preserve the institutional memory of the SDGs.



IPU President
Saber Chowdhury and
Speaker of the National
Assembly of Tanzania
Anne Makinda. © IPU/Joel
Sheakoski, 2015



Speaker of Parliament of
Trinidad and Tobago Wade
Mark.

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There are different ways for parliaments to mainstream the SDGs in their work. Constituting a dedicated committee or advisory council for the SDGs may support policy coherence between portfolio committees. Still, no single committee should be responsible for the entire SDGs framework. Each portfolio committee must be in the lead in advancing the one or two goals that may come under its purview.

Ultimately, what matters most to advancing the SDGs is that each goal is championed by a number of MPs. Parliaments can also institute a regular debate of the plenary to review progress on the basis of a report provided by the government. The budget process, common to all parliaments, provides another important opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of the SDGs.

Parliaments will have a key role to play in mobilizing sufficient resources for the SDGs. Among other things, they can impose tax increases and close tax loopholes. They can also adopt laws to induce private investments in key sectors of the economy or to forge innovative partnerships between public and private sectors.

In the final analysis, the implementation of the SDGs by parliaments will not be easy. There will be many successes as well as failures. What is certain is that the SDGs are here to stay and that governments are now accountable for the goals year after year. Parliaments must seize this opportunity to strengthen their legislative, oversight, and representative roles. The IPU, for its part, must continue to provide guidance to parliaments and facilitate an exchange of best practices among its members.



Summary report from Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament

We, women Speakers of Parliament from 23 countries gathered on 29 and 30 August 2015 on the occasion of our Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

We debated “Innovating for gender equality,” with a view to identifying key strategies and action to step up progress. Our debates also aimed to feed into the deliberations and outcome of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

Gender equality is at the heart of democracy, peace and sustainable development. It is a matter of human rights, human dignity, justice and good governance. It is undeniable that progress has been achieved at many levels and in many spheres but today no country can claim to have realised full equality between men and women. Women account for half the world’s population, two parliaments have a majority of women in parliament (Bolivia and Rwanda) and one has equal numbers of men and women members (Andorra) but yet women make up only 22 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide and 16 per cent of Speakers of Parliament. Women continue to earn systematically less than men for the same work, and millions of girls are prevented from attending school. The scourge of violence against women remains a key issue in every country and internationally.

Gender inequality holds all our countries back, and the struggle to overcome it must therefore be a priority for each and every one of us – both men and women – as we embark on and commit to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The power of collective action

We strongly believe in the power of change and collective action.

For this power of change to make a meaningful impact, women’s share in politics has to be equal to men’s share. There can be no democracy without equality between men and women in decision-making in all spheres and at all levels. Efficient policy-making is handicapped by not being sufficiently representative and inclusive.

Affirmative action has paved and continues to pave the way for progress. Maximizing its impact will require political will and effective enforcement. In our Parliaments and Governments, we need to open up all policy areas, including finance and defence, to the contribution of women. We also need to ensure that the work environment is conducive to the participation of men and women and transform institutions, such as parliaments, into gender-sensitive ones.

Women Speakers of Parliament worked on identifying innovative ways to speed up the process of achieving gender equality. © IPU/Joel Sheakoski, 2015

The power of change is also contingent on our collective action. Solidarity among women has proven to be key to many successes on the road to gender equality. Experience-sharing and strategizing together are first step. Developing platforms for common action, such as women's parliamentary caucuses, is another.

We firmly believe, however, that collective action for gender equality is not the exclusive preserve of women; men, boys and girls are also key stakeholders and partners. As women leaders, we invite our male colleagues to be at the forefront of our collective engagement for equality. We recognize the value of campaigns such as the IPU's *My power for women's power* campaign and UN Women's *He for She* campaign, as platforms to generate exchange and common action.

We call on men Speakers and men parliamentarians to become advocates for gender equality, to persuade boys and men that our countries and our world can only benefit from equal opportunities and rights and to lead by example by condemning all forms of discrimination, stereotypes and violence against women.

Investing in women's empowerment

Empowering women is a determining factor of progress. As long as inequalities between men and women remain in the economic sphere, the family, schools and universities, science or access to technology, all of our countries will not reach their full development potential. Gender-sensitive policies need to become the norm instead of the exception.

Women's rights cannot be forgotten even before they become a reality. Yet many women are not aware of their human rights. Education and awareness-raising are key to building knowledge among women on their socio-economic, cultural, civic and political rights. This knowledge has to reach all women, and in particular the most vulnerable groups such as rural women, women with disabilities and the poor.

The economic empowerment of women is a priority, without which women cannot reach their potential and contribute to their country's development, especially as they are more vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. We need to craft policies and legislation that secure access to property and land rights for women, as well as access to loans.

Changing mentalities

The swift progress we desire for gender equality implies challenging mindsets and changing mentalities.

There are persistent and deep cultural practices and beliefs that constitute major challenges to achieving gender equality in all spheres and all countries. We need to step up both our collective and individual action to change mentalities, challenging traditional social and gender roles.

Communication is at the heart of change. The media and social media could be better used to communicate more on gender equality. These can be powerful vehicles for change if used in a responsible and non-discriminatory manner, avoiding stereotypes. Our parliaments should develop stronger communication strategies on gender equality, open spaces for debates on electronic platforms and reach out more proactively to communities and the grassroots.

More attention needs to be paid to working closely with communities – bridging the gap that is often felt by citizens between them and their representatives. Bringing parliaments, and in particular women Speakers, to the people, will help change mentalities. Initiatives aimed at facilitating access to Speakers, such as Speaker time, enhancing interaction between MPs and citizens, such as rural parliaments, should be further developed.

The most pressing priority is to reach out to girls and boys and to educate them about gender equality. We firmly believe that gender equality should be part of school curricula. Educating boys and girls on human rights and gender equality from an early age would help to instil a culture of non-violence and respect in relations between the sexes. Educational materials used in the schools must also be reviewed in order to eliminate stereotypes. Beyond the education system, our young need to learn by seeing men and women leaders, as well as men and women in their communities, lead by example and promote equality and respect in their speech, behaviour and acts.

We have the power to open a space for debate and as leaders and women Speakers, we have the responsibility to place sensitive issues squarely on the political and public agenda, tackling taboos and encouraging dialogue and exchange. Issues that have been perceived until now as private matters such as marital rape or child marriage should be on the public agenda if we want to curb existing practices and behaviours that hold women back. Debate is the starting point for building understanding and effecting a change in mentality. We should lead the way in prompting such dialogue.

Ending violence against women – a priority

The most extreme violation of women's rights is violence against women. No nation is spared; the latest global and regional estimates by the World Health Organization show that one out of every three women worldwide has experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence by someone other than a partner.

Whether in the public or the private sphere, violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations robs them of their dignity, violates their fundamental rights, damages their health, reduces their productivity and prevents them from achieving their full potential. It also has significant consequences for peace and security and a negative impact on development.

Addressing violence against women is a complex issue that requires profound change. It means looking at power relations, addressing patriarchy, changing mentalities, and challenging the social roles and stereotypes that we have internalized, including those related to men. It also means enabling women to take ownership of their lives, their bodies and their destinies.

Addressing violence against women requires crafting comprehensive legislation and policies that address all forms of violence and include prevention, criminalization and reparation. More generally, a legal framework that is non-discriminatory, supports women's empowerment and addresses all forms of discrimination contributes to achieving gender equality and eradicating violence against women. Parliamentary and governmental action can build on international and regional commitments such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women and the Istanbul Convention.

Discrimination and violence against women and girls are exacerbated during conflict. Fighting the root causes of such practices will ultimately make for more peaceful societies.

2015 marks the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This provides a perfect opportunity to take stock of progress made, build on best practices and ensure renewed commitment in this area. Only a small group of countries have so far developed national action plans on this resolution. We need to take this up in our respective countries and see to it that appropriate legislation and resources are secured to facilitate the implementation of this and other resolutions on women, peace and security.

In light of the alarming reports of current violations of women's rights in conflict situations, we must take urgent action at the national, regional and international levels to protect women and ensure that survivors receive the support they require.

Prevention should be enhanced through the training of peace-keeping missions on gender equality and violence against women. These should include a gender unit to better meet the needs of women and girls who face increased risk of violence in conflict

situations. Some countries innovated by sending all-female peace units to conflict areas, sending a strong signal about what priorities need to be addressed. These missions should be held up to the highest standards and accountable for any crimes committed.

Early warning systems should be developed or strengthened to prevent violence. In specific contexts such as camps, initiatives focusing on men, providing them with support and attention, have proven to be useful.

For victims first and foremost, additional efforts must be deployed to ensure they have access to justice and reparation and perpetrators are prosecuted. Post-conflict trauma should be given more attention as part of a common strategy to provide victims with medical care and counselling and so help them rebuild their lives.

Achieving gender equality and ending violence against women is the responsibility of both men and women. It is a public issue. Men are part and parcel of the solution; they should take an active part in the debate and stand up for women's rights. The silent majority of non-violent men must speak out now and assume their responsibilities alongside women.

Oversight role of parliaments

As women Speakers and parliamentarians, our action for gender equality has to be vocal both at the local and the global level. We hold our governments to account on all matters and should exercise our oversight on gender equality. We need to question policies and legislation from a gender perspective and to mainstream gender in the functioning of our parliaments.

To take up this task, it is crucial to be able to rely on sex-disaggregated data and gender impact studies. Such tools can better inform our debates and decision-making in all matters before us. Assessment of the implementation of policies, legislation and plans of action are key steps in policy-making for gender equality. We need to draw conclusions and policy orientations based on lessons learned. Here again, political will and commitment among politicians are crucial ingredients.

Financing for gender equality

It is undeniable that advancing gender equality will require adequate financing. Gender budgeting needs to become a norm as it can provide a comprehensive and coordinated framework to set gender equality objectives, allocate adequate resources and monitor progress.

Development cooperation can and should also embody and deliver for gender equality. International financial institutions can greatly contribute to placing gender equality at the heart of development policies, programmes and plans.

We are convinced that joint, coordinated and strong action will bring about change and request the parliamentary community to work together to achieve gender equality in one generation.

Background reports

I. Implementation of major recommendations of previous Speakers' Conferences – the parliamentary dimension to international cooperation

Every five years since 2000, the IPU has convened a World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. The World Conferences have been conceived and held in connection with major United Nations Summits. As such, they have aimed to take stock of and bring a parliamentary perspective to bear on the main challenges facing the international community.

This paper aims to map progress in the implementation of the major recommendations from previous Speakers' Conferences. It also tracks developments in the interaction between the United Nations system, parliaments and the IPU, and examines challenges to and opportunities for bridging the democracy gap in international relations.

Introduction

The first World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on the eve of the Millennium Summit, in September 2000. It concluded with a ground-breaking Declaration entitled The Parliamentary Vision for International Cooperation at the Dawn of the Third Millennium. In the Declaration, parliamentary leaders noted the multifaceted challenges facing the world in a host of areas: peace and security, environmental degradation, impact of globalization, poverty and the debt burden, etc. They called for a strong and effective United Nations to meet these challenges, and for meaningful UN reform to this end.

At the highest political level, they underscored the ideals and fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and reaffirmed their commitment to the rule of law, in particular international human rights and international humanitarian law. They stressed that changes in international relations and the growing complexity of globalization and interdependence required parliaments and parliamentarians to play a new and active role vis-à-vis the global agenda. They therefore called on all parliaments and their world organization – the IPU – to lend a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation.

This meant that, **at the national level**, parliaments could influence their respective country's policy on matters dealt with at the United Nations and other international negotiating forums, keeping themselves informed of the progress and outcome of negotiations, providing input for the country's negotiating mandates, deciding on the ratification of international conventions and treaties, and contributing actively to the subsequent implementation process.

At the regional level, parliaments needed to make the best possible use of regional inter-parliamentary organizations and through them seek to influence the corresponding intergovernmental bodies. They undertook to examine closely the work of such organizations in order to heighten their efficiency and avoid duplication, while also exchanging experiences with a view to enhancing coherence.

At the international level, at the same time as it reinforced the political input of national parliaments into the process of inter-State cooperation, the IPU needed to be consolidated as the world organization for inter-parliamentary cooperation and for relaying parliamentary input to the work of the United Nations.

Group photo from the First World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. © IPU Photo by Terry Deglau for Eastman Kodak.





Participants to the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.
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Relations with the United Nations

The parliamentary dimension to international cooperation, especially in the context of the United Nations, has evolved considerably over the past 15 years.

The Millennium Declaration adopted by Heads of State and Government in 2000 acknowledged the need for closer cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments, working through the IPU as their world organization, in various fields, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law, human rights and democracy, and gender issues. In 2002, the IPU obtained permanent observer status at the United Nations, with the right to address UN sessions and circulate its official documents. This was a first step towards implementing the call issued by the First World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, held in September 2005 also at United Nations Headquarters in New York, concluded with a consensus Declaration entitled *Bridging the Democracy Gap in International Relations: A Stronger Role for Parliaments*. The declaration noted that global governance required effective mechanisms of transparency and accountability, with parliaments playing a greater role, and called for a strategic partnership between the United Nations and the IPU.

At the 2005 Millennium +5 Summit that followed, UN Member States recognized the need for internal reform that would allow greater parliamentary involvement in relation to the global agenda. The new UN bodies set up on that occasion – the Human Rights Council, the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Development Cooperation Forum of the Economic and Social Council – specifically invited parliamentary involvement.

Today, joint sessions are regularly held at the United Nations, examples being the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations or the parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the outcomes of which are designed to inform the UN decision-making process. The UN General Assembly

has encouraged a parliamentary component to major UN processes and conferences, which the IPU is now providing in multiple areas (climate change, financing for development, post-2015 sustainable development goals, gender equality, nuclear disarmament, etc.). Member States are encouraged to include parliamentarians in national delegations to major global conferences, and parliaments are given the opportunity to be directly involved in monitoring the implementation of international commitments (mechanisms are in place in particular vis-à-vis the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review mechanism).

To help guide this work, in 2007 the IPU set up its own Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs. One of its first achievements was a policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments, which was endorsed by the IPU's governing bodies, presented at the 2010 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, and circulated at the UN General Assembly (www.ipu.org/un-e/un-cmt.htm). In keeping with the vision outlined at the First World Conference in 2000, much of the work relating to the United Nations needed to be done by parliaments at the national level. The IPU was called upon to play a supporting role: serving as a facilitator and catalyst, helping to share good parliamentary practices and encourage action by parliaments and parliamentarians, facilitating interaction with the United Nations world and, more generally, helping to ensure that the views of the parliamentary community are heard at the United Nations.

Since then, the Committee on United Nations Affairs has been providing a space where legislators can interact with senior UN officials, debate and draft parliamentary input for major UN processes, and review parliamentary action for the implementation of international commitments. The Committee's Advisory Group (now Bureau) has conducted a series of field missions (Albania, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Haiti, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam), in an effort to examine the impact of UN reform and of UN operations at the national level, and to encourage greater



parliamentary involvement therein. This also responds to the call made by the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament for greater parliamentary vigilance vis-à-vis United Nations activities. This point was clearly made during the 2014 mission to Haiti, a country with a massive UN peacekeeping operation whose parliament was finding it difficult to obtain relevant information and exercise its oversight role in connection with a foreign military presence on its territory.

There has been a gradual shift in how the United Nations system approaches cooperation with parliaments at the national level. Although much remains to be done, UN Country Teams are paying more attention to their relationship with the national parliament, while also seeking greater coordination with other development partners. In so doing, the teams are responding to the need for a more structured and integrated manner of working with national parliaments, in particular by engaging with parliaments as partners (not just recipients of technical assistance) and involving them in consultations on critical national strategies (which was not the case before). The launch in 2014 and subsequent endorsement by dozens of parliaments and development partners of the IPU-led Common Principles for Support to Parliament is a concrete and implementable step in this direction.

In 2005, parliamentary leaders also called on the United Nations to integrate human rights, good governance and the rule of law more fully into its work. Parliaments and the IPU play a crucial role here, enhancing both national ownership and implementation of key commitments, while bringing a parliamentary perspective to these crucial issues. By working with the UN treaty bodies, for example, the IPU has helped parliaments increase their leverage in the national review of international human rights commitments. In the case of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so that they can become an integral part of the process, i.e. provide input for the national report, attend the relevant committee sessions, and receive United Nations findings for consideration and action. In recent years, the IPU has likewise focused on enhancing synergies between parliaments and the UN Human Rights Council in particular, so as to ensure that the results of the latter's Universal Periodic

Review (UPR) mechanism are translated into concrete action at the national level. The regional seminars convened by the IPU over the past few years on this issue have been very successful, mobilizing parliamentary interest and involvement in helping to meet critical human rights commitments.

Another, more recent example resides in the steadfast efforts made by both the IPU and national parliaments to integrate democratic governance as a pillar of the post-2015 development agenda. While the recommendations set forth in the 2013 Quito Communiqué (endorsed by the IPU Member Parliaments) were integrated into the initial UN working documents, such as the Report of the UN High-level Panel of Experts on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the current intergovernmental negotiating process has yet to determine the final outcome on the SDGs. The recently adopted Hanoi Declaration on the SDGs: Turning Words into Action provides another major parliamentary contribution to the UN process. (For more information on this point, see the document submitted under item 2(b) of the agenda, Parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the SDGs.)

Cooperation with regional parliamentary assemblies

At their World Conferences, parliamentary leaders have called on the IPU to cooperate more closely with regional and parliamentary assemblies and organizations, with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and interregional parliamentary cooperation. To this end, the IPU has endeavoured to maintain a regular flow of information with other parliamentary organizations that goes beyond preparations for the regular IPU assemblies, in which they participate as IPU Associate Members or Permanent Observers. During the 127th IPU assembly (Quebec City, October 2012), a joint session was held with some 30 parliamentary organizations to examine the parliamentary contribution to UN peacebuilding operations. The very productive discussions led to a series of recommendations submitted to the United Nations.

On the occasion of IPU Assemblies, parliamentary networks with a thematic focus – nuclear disarmament (Parliamentarians

for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament), small arms and light weapons (SALW Parliamentary Forum), the fight against corruption (Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption) – have been convening various side events attended by the broader parliamentary community, and contributing their expertise to the work of the IPU Standing Committees (in particular in the process leading up to the adoption of resolutions).

In an effort to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication, the IPU has also been reaching out to other organizations, such as the Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment (issues relating to the environment and climate change) and the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank (role of parliaments in scrutinizing loan agreements). Needless to say, there is scope to further enhance this work, but it would require an additional allocation of time and resources by the IPU.

Parliaments and democracy

At their World Conference, parliamentary leaders emphasized the importance of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, adopted by IPU Member Parliaments on 15 September 1997. In 2005, they encouraged every parliament to organize, at around the same time each year, an International Day of Parliaments, so as to engage and reaffirm their commitment to democracy at the national and international levels. As part of its work to lend a parliamentary dimension to the International Conference on New or Restored Democracies, the IPU promoted the adoption of an International Day of Democracy on 15 September. The UN General Assembly, acknowledging the resilience and universality of the fundamental principles of democracy, formally endorsed this proposal in 2007. Since then, the IPU has encouraged all parliaments to mark the International Day and, as evidenced on the dedicated IPU webpage, hundreds of events have taken place in over 100 countries. The theme of this year's International Day, agreed with the United Nations, was Engaging Youth on Democracy.

The Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva in July 2010, concluded with a declaration entitled Securing Global Democratic Accountability for the Common Good. Building on developments since 2000, parliamentary leaders pledged to support one another, relying on the collective experience and wisdom of members, to make their parliaments more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

Speakers in 2010 also reaffirmed their support to IPU's institutional capacity-building programme, which aims to strengthen national parliaments by providing tailored guidance and technical assistance projects. In conducting this work, the IPU has been focusing on parliaments in countries emerging from conflict or in transition to democracy, as well as on parliaments from the least developed countries. Generally, IPU support looks at institutional development, professional development/awareness-raising, legislative content development and infrastructure development. The collective experience of IPU Members is a rich source of parliamentary

expertise (MPs and parliamentary officials) and vital to IPU's capacity-building work.

Recent years have witnessed an exceptional increase in the demand for IPU capacity-building assistance with an unprecedented number of activities being conducted. Since the last speakers' conference, some 150 capacity-building activities were implemented in more than 40 countries. In keeping with the First Standing Committee resolution adopted by the 126th IPU Assembly on the Arab Spring which urges the IPU to lend support to the democratization process under way in the region, the IPU accompanied transition processes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Countries in transition have a unique opportunity to address challenges of the past and build stronger and more sustainable institutions. The IPU has therefore paid specific attention to developing medium- and long-term capacity-building projects in such situations: Myanmar and Egypt are two prominent cases in point.

In its capacity-building work the IPU is guided by universally recognized criteria for democratic parliaments as set out in *Parliament and democracy in the 21st century: A guide to good practice*. The majority of the capacity-building work is carried out in close partnership with the United Nations, and in particular UNDP. To facilitate better coordination and more effective delivery of support to parliaments, the IPU also developed common principles for parliamentary support based on lessons learned over more than four decades of parliamentary assistance. These principles were adopted at the 131st IPU Assembly and have since been endorsed by several organizations and parliaments.

At their World Conference in 2010, parliamentary leaders pledged to help promote a climate of tolerance and to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different, which also implies protecting the rights of persons belonging to minority and indigenous groups. The subsequent International Parliamentary Conference on Parliaments, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Effective Participation in Politics (Chiapas, November 2010) issued an ambitious set of recommendations for parliamentary action. The IPU has worked with the United Nations to further the goals, produced handbooks and other tools for parliamentarians, engaged in discussions at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and helped to influence the outcome of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Parliamentary leaders also emphatically called for gender equality and the political empowerment of women, and undertook to combat all forms of discrimination against women. The IPU has continued to provide priority support through its flagship programme on gender partnership. It has proactively engaged in parliamentary campaigns with Members to combat violence against women, and conducted numerous workshops and seminars at the national and regional levels. In 2012, it launched the parliamentary Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments, and has since helped parliaments conduct self-assessments of their performance in this area. The subject of the General Debate at the 131st IPU Assembly

(Geneva, October 2014) was Achieving Gender Equality, Ending Violence Against Women. IPU also joined UN Women and the Future Policy Council in conferring the 2014 Future Policy Award on some of the best and most effective policies in this area, hosting the award ceremony at the 131st Assembly.

In 2010, parliamentary leaders emphasized the importance of addressing the concerns and aspirations of young people and encouraging their participation in public life. As part of its internal reform in 2012–2013, the IPU established its own Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Member Parliaments were encouraged to include young legislators in their national delegations to IPU assemblies and to nominate them for IPU offices. The first two Global Conferences of Young Parliamentarians were held in Geneva in October 2014 and in Tokyo in May 2015. Worldwide Support for Development, a Japan-based foundation, has given the IPU a generous grant, enabling it to continue its work on global youth engagement and democracy-building in Asia.

Parliamentary leaders also condemned the usurpation of political power by force and the persecution of elected representatives of the people. The adoption of new methods of work in 2014 formalized a new *modus operandi* for the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians in a bid to offer more effective protection and redress to parliamentarians whose human rights have been violated. Through a more personalized and proactive approach, the committee now conducts more country missions, speaks out consistently and publicly in the face of potential or ongoing violations affecting MPs and involves IPU Member Parliaments more systematically, emphasizing the fundamental principle of parliamentary solidarity, to bring about satisfactory solutions to the hundreds of cases under examination.

Bridging the democracy gap in international cooperation

As in 2000 and 2005, the 2010 World Conference focused on parliamentary engagement on the international stage. Parliamentary leaders deplored the lack of progress made towards finding sustainable solutions to major global issues and warned that the situation would persist unless multilateral institutions were made more democratic and representative and unless more participatory practices were established at the international level. The time had come for an imaginative leap of faith.

For the first time, official reports of the UN Secretary-General on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU called for a strategic partnership between the two organizations that would lend a meaningful parliamentary dimension to UN deliberations and negotiations. Consensus resolutions of the UN General Assembly in both 2012 and 2014 endorsed these recommendations. They also called for the UN–IPU Cooperation Agreement (a very basic agreement signed in 1996) to be revised to reflect progress in the past 18 years and to place the institutional relationship between the two organizations on a stronger footing. In line with the mandate conferred by the IPU governing bodies, the content and

terms of the revised Cooperation Agreement are currently being negotiated with the United Nations.

The most recent report of the UN Secretary-General on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU provides a comprehensive overview of this engagement, underscoring its many benefits and pointing to the scope for further development (see www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-68-827.pdf).

All of these gains will need to be consolidated. In multiple discussions and public statements, the UN Secretary-General has underscored the critical importance of involvement by the IPU and its Members in both the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the new Sustainable Development Goals, and the process leading up to the conclusion of a global climate change pact this year. For the IPU to respond to these challenges, it will need sufficient human and financial resources.

Although progress has been made over the past 15 years on many of the recommendations formulated by parliamentary leaders at their three world conferences, it is evident that much still remains to be done. The world today is at a critical juncture. Parliaments and parliamentarians are duty-bound to tackle these challenges head-on and lead their nations into a more peaceful and prosperous future.



4th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

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II. Parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) established that a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would need to replace the Millennium Development Goals when the latter expire at the end of 2015.

Whereas 15 years ago the United Nations consultations on the MDGs were very limited in scope and did not involve major stakeholders such as national parliaments, the global talks on the new SDGs have been much more inclusive. This paper examines parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and its accompanying SDGs.

As the centerpiece of the so-called post-2015 development agenda, the SDGs will be universal in scope, applying to both developed and developing countries, and will unite the two main threads of international development – poverty eradication and sustainable development – into a single coherent and “transformative” framework.

In order to ensure buy-in by governments and all stakeholders, the United Nations began consultations on the SDGs in 2013. The IPU immediately joined the process, to help inject a parliamentary perspective into the new framework and to prepare the ground for implementation by parliaments afterwards. The IPU consulted widely with its own membership on at least four occasions: the 128th Assembly in Quito (March 2013), which concluded with the Quito Communique; the 2013 and 2014 parliamentary hearings at the United Nations; and the 132nd Assembly in Hanoi (April 2015), which adopted the Hanoi Declaration.

The first three of these parliamentary consultations focused on the “what” of the SDGs, i.e. issues that parliamentarians felt the SDGs should address. In contrast, the consultation in Hanoi marked the beginning of a discussion at the IPU on the “how” of the SDGs, i.e. how parliaments can help implement the new goals on their own as well as in partnership with the United Nations.

The “what” of the SDGs: campaigning for specific goals and for an IPU role

Three key messages emerged from the parliamentary consultations, and they came to form the official IPU position in the negotiations of the SDGs.

The first message is that, in order to achieve the transformative agenda that the SDGs promise, a whole new economic model is needed to break the dependence on growth as the main engine of human progress. In a finite planet, prosperity can no longer be centred on the indefinite expansion of material production and consumption; the focus must instead be on growing levels of human well-being and happiness. Consumption levels in developed and developing countries will need to converge toward the middle ground of a globally sustainable lifestyle. The economy will have to be “greened” to produce more with less input, but that will not suffice to decouple it absolutely from the environment unless overall global consumption levels are kept in check. The fact that the world’s population is due to expand by two billion in the next two or three decades lends added urgency to this task.

The second message has to do with the key role of democratic governance as both a means and an end of development. The IPU defines democratic governance as a set of institutions and processes (public and private) that are representative, accountable, transparent and effective at exercising their mandate, so that all people will benefit fairly. Governance has long been recognized by the United Nations (including in the Millennium Declaration) as an enabler of development, but rarely as an end, that is, as the manifestation of an inherent right. For the IPU, governance is an end because participation in public affairs is an entitlement and a key dimension of well-being.

The third message is that the SDGs must be people-centred, in recognition that the fulfilment and realization of all human rights will constitute the litmus test of the SDGs’ successful implementation 15 years from now. Parliamentarians have endorsed a goal on inequality as one of the main challenges, next to the eradication of poverty in all its forms, to this people-centred vision of sustainable development. They have also called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and for women’s issues to be mainstreamed throughout the entire SDG framework.

On the strength of this, the IPU and its Members have been campaigning at the United Nations, in their home parliaments and around the world for a stand-alone goal on democratic governance. At the United Nations, the IPU has closely followed the deliberations of the special Working Group of the General Assembly on the SDGs and spoken in that forum on behalf of parliaments. At the same time, it has asked parliaments to hold debates and engage with government negotiators at the United Nations.

At the conclusion of difficult deliberations in 2014, the Working Group had recommended to the General Assembly a set of 17 goals and 169 targets for further negotiation by all UN Member States in 2015. However, realizing that the proposed goals were probably the best compromise possible, when negotiations resumed in January 2015 Member States agreed not to reopen them. This effectively means that the so-called “governance goal” (number 16) has been secured. Among other things, this goal would commit countries to “develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels” and to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels”.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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Although some “technical proofing” of the proposed 169 targets may still be required, the main issues up for negotiation relate to the UN Declaration accompanying the SDGs, the means of implementation (finance, trade, debt relief, aid, etc.), and finally, the monitoring mechanism for assessing progress, including through a set of global indicators.

The IPU President wrote to all IPU Members at the start of 2015 to inform them of these developments and to encourage parliaments to follow this process closely. Monthly updates on the negotiations were sent to all Members by the IPU Secretary General. The IPU Office in New York contacted UN missions, proposing that the UN Declaration contain strong language on the role of parliaments. The IPU President himself met with the process facilitators in New York.

The “how” of the SDGs: mobilizing parliaments for implementation

The Hanoi Declaration reaffirms a vision of sustainable development that is people-centred and firmly anchored in the international human rights framework. It expresses strong support for the 17 SDGs the United Nations has proposed and acknowledges that the issues on which IPU Members have engaged in advocacy – health, gender, inequality and governance – have been captured by specific goals. It also welcomes the fact that climate change, a fundamental threat to people and the planet, is fully integrated into the framework.

The Hanoi Declaration commits parliaments to translating the goals into enforceable laws and regulations at the national level, including, critically, through the budget process. This will require institutionalizing the goals in parliaments so that they can be mainstreamed in all deliberative processes and over the entire 15-year implementation period. The Hanoi Declaration further calls on parliamentarians to build national ownership of the SDGs by proactively engaging their constituents and by working to tailor the global goals to their countries’ specific circumstances, including through the process for drawing up the national sustainable development plan.

In the lead-up to the 132nd Assembly in Hanoi, all 166 Member Parliaments were invited to respond to a questionnaire on how they saw the SDGs and were preparing to implement them. Fifty-seven parliaments responded. Encouragingly, 39 out of 57 parliaments were aware of their government’s position in the SDG negotiations; 46 parliaments knew who was leading those negotiations; and 34 parliaments planned to obtain regular briefings from the government on developments in the negotiations before a final agreement was reached. On the flip side, less than half of all respondents were taking any initiative: only 18 parliaments had held a debate in the previous six months to review the government’s position in the negotiations; only 21 parliaments were planning to hold hearings with constituents and civil society to obtain their views on the SDGs; and only 16 parliaments were reviewing the committee system to help mainstream the goals. These results suggest the need for further efforts to spur parliaments into preparing for the SDGs.

Another parliamentary contribution to the SDG process, one that touches on one of the most important “how” questions, was channelled into a separate UN process, on financing for development. This process is intended to follow up on two UN conferences, in Monterrey (2002) and Doha (2008), and is expected to conclude with a major new agreement on financing for development at a third international conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015. The Addis Ababa Accord, as that agreement will be called, will provide much of the substance for the means of implementation corresponding to Goal 17 of the proposed SDGs. Given that the Hanoi Declaration also refers to SDG-related financing needs, the IPU has been campaigning for language on parliaments to be reflected in the Addis Ababa Accord.

At the technical level, the IPU has joined a number of partners in a UN-led exercise to provide input on the selection of indicators for governance (Goal 16) and gender equality (Goal 5). It is important to select strong indicators that effectively gauge progress on these issues, including with respect to the role of parliaments. In another initiative, the IPU joined a consultative group led by UNDP on the updated design of MyWorld, the citizen-led global survey on the SDGs in which some seven million people have participated. The new MyWorld survey

is meant to become a tool that parliamentarians and other policymakers (ministers, UN officials, etc.) at the country level can use to garner citizens’ feedback on the implementation of the SDGs on the ground.

Within the IPU Secretariat, staff consultations have begun to flesh out possible operational approaches to assist parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs beginning in 2016, when a new five-year strategic plan will need to be crafted.

To do this effectively, the IPU itself will need to mainstream the SDGs in all its operations to avoid compartmentalization and maximize synergies between activities. With regard to parliaments, the IPU may need to retool in order to pursue two parallel approaches: one to help parliaments institutionalize the SDGs in all of their deliberative processes (beginning with the committee system), the other to help them advance specific goals in respect of which the IPU may have a specific comparative advantage or expertise, such as gender equality, health or climate change. All of this will require strengthening the IPU with additional resources and political support from Member Parliaments.

IPU work on the MDGs

Like most other institutions, the IPU and parliaments in general took some time to take stock of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after their adoption in 2000. In close cooperation with the United Nations, the MDG agenda eventually came to inform the work of the IPU both politically and at the operational level.

It was clear from the start that the IPU could not pursue the entire agenda at once. Operationally, in terms of projects and activities to support the implementation of the MDGs through parliaments, choices had to be made as to what to focus on, and partnerships had to be established to support the work. Limited and diminishing resources (due to budget cuts) meant that much of the MDG work of the IPU had to rely on unpredictable voluntary funding.

The IPU’s project work pursued two tracks: one was meant to look at the parliamentary structures that, institutionally, could help mainstream the MDGs throughout the entire policy process; the other focused on supporting a limited number of MDGs (more precisely, some of the targets within those goals), namely MDG 3 (gender equality and women’s empowerment), MDG 4 (child mortality), MDG 5 (maternal health), MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS, but excluding malaria and other targets) and MDG 8 (mainly foreign aid and trade targets). Almost all of this work depended on partnerships with UN agencies or programmes such as UNDP and its Millennium Campaign, UN Women, the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, as well as the World Trade Organization (technically not part of the UN system).

The work on parliamentary structures – consisting mainly of case studies – is particularly illustrative of how parliaments have approached the MDG agenda. Overall, it showed considerable unevenness in terms of focus areas and a general lack of capacity to institutionalize the MDGs. Where specialized MDG caucuses, committees or networks have been established, there is often little evidence of their effectiveness. Many parliaments also lack the capacity and often the legal authority to participate in key processes, such as the crafting of the national sustainable development plan or the budget bill. All of these considerations will come into play again when it is time to implement the SDGs.

Looking at the goal-specific work of the IPU, a broad assessment may be that the gender goal has received the most attention, followed by HIV/AIDS and the other health-related goals. This is partly a function of the priorities of donors on which the IPU depends, and partly a result of consultations with Member Parliaments within the IPU’s executive structures. Some work areas, like that of trade and development cooperation (MDG 8), remain focused on engaging parliaments in international negotiations or dialogues and have yet to mature into actual parliamentary strengthening projects owing to a lack of resources from Members or donors. Clearly, given the intrinsic differences between the MDGs and the SDGs, the IPU will need to re-evaluate its goal-specific work going forward. Goal 16 of the SDGs, the so-called “governance goal” (which was not part of the MDG framework), will be one of the main areas of focus for the organization.

On the political front, the IPU has helped raise awareness of the MDGs among parliaments through a number of resolutions on topics such as HIV/AIDS (2001, 2005), maternal and child health (2012), trade, debt and development finance (2000, 2004, 2005, 2013), foreign aid (2008), and biodiversity and environmental sustainability (2002, 2004, 2006). In addition, at a number of parliamentary debates organized over the years at the United Nations in New York or at the regional level, the MDGs have been either the main subject or have occupied part of the agenda. It is expected that future IPU resolutions will address various aspects of the SDGs over the next 15 years.

III. Challenges facing parliaments today

The purpose of this paper is to inform the debate during the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. It outlines challenges facing parliaments and makes recommendations based on the experience and practice of parliaments around the world.

Introduction

There is today a broad consensus that parliaments are necessary: virtually every state has one, in one form or another. It is a telling sign that when a country experiences a military coup d'état, parliament is usually one of the first state institutions to be suspended, because its deliberative role makes it an obstacle to the untrammelled exercise of power.

Parliament is the institution that represents the people's voice in government. It is the cornerstone of democracy. The functions that parliaments fulfil, notably law-making, oversight and representation, are fundamental to the legitimacy of government. If parliaments did not exist, they would need to be invented.

Since the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2010, many events have demonstrated the universal attachment to democracy as a form of government, and to parliament as the central institution of democracy. The call for democratic institutions that would represent the interests of all citizens was a main feature of the uprisings that swept North Africa in 2011. Tunisia has drafted a constitution through an inclusive process that has set the tone for a new and vibrant form of politics in the country. In Myanmar, the transition from half a century of military rule is under way, with new spaces being created for freedom of expression and political action. Globally, the percentage of women parliamentarians has increased from 18.8 per cent in January 2010 to 22.1 per cent in January 2015.

Yet democratic transitions are fragile. Many examples show that when authoritarian regimes collapse, they are not automatically replaced by democratic institutions. Building a culture of democracy and political tolerance requires a long-term commitment. Transition is fraught with countless challenges, and extremist groups will often use violence to try to prevent democracy from taking root.

The paradox is that while parliaments remain a symbol of hope and the belief that people can have a voice in decision-making, they continue to face many challenges, in long-established as in more recent democracies.

This paper describes some of the most common challenges faced by parliaments today, though not necessarily by every

parliament, or with the same intensity or at the same time. Some may face other challenges, specific to their own particular context. The challenges listed here are ones that considered relevant to parliaments generally at the current time. The paper concludes by sketching out some possible responses to those challenges.

Public scepticism

It is no secret that citizens do not hold politicians in high esteem. Survey data everywhere suggest that public confidence in the authority of parliament is low and falling. The reasons are multiple and can be difficult to unpack. They include the following.

- The competitive nature of politics means that there are almost always winners and losers, promises that cannot be kept and problems that cannot easily be solved. A toxic combination of adversarial politics, broken promises and a perceived inability to bring about positive change undermines public confidence in political processes.
- Media coverage generates and reinforces negative perceptions by focusing on the spectacular, theatrical aspects of parliament, which are more sensational than the debate and deliberation that make up the vast majority of parliamentary work.
- Public understanding of the role of parliament is generally limited, and even the most highly educated may struggle to distinguish what is the preserve of the executive and what is that of the legislative branch of government. This contributes to unrealistic expectations of what parliament and individual parliamentarians can achieve, and commensurate disenchantment when they are perceived to fall short.
- Citizens clearly expect their elected representatives to serve the public good and parliamentarians to be morally beyond reproach. Parliamentarians are arguably held to a higher standard in that way than other sectors of society. Instances of misconduct are magnified by the media lens, and a perception of unethical behaviour, even corruption, can spread to the entire political system.
- People question the relevance of parliament when they do not see what it does on their behalf. It can be difficult to demonstrate how the work of parliament is important to people's lives in concrete terms, and what life would be like if parliament did not exist.

WE NEED TO STAY
CONNECTED TO THE PEOPLE !



At the heart of public scepticism, perhaps, is a judgement about parliament's capacity to perform its functions effectively and to **embody key democratic values**. Even without being constitutional experts, people have a sense of whether parliament can effectively influence the law-making process, hold government to account or debate opposing points of view.

The environment in which parliaments operate is changing, and in some ways very fast. **Much decision-making power no longer resides at the national level**, where parliaments can exert the most influence. Global financial markets increasingly shape our national policies, and international agreements can constrain a state's ability to regulate the economy independently. More decisions are taken within intergovernmental forums where parliaments typically have little influence – for example regarding the rules of international trade – and national politics are seen as powerless to influence developments.

The Internet, meanwhile, enables citizens to network and mobilize around issues even across national borders, in ways that are much faster and widely impactful than ever before. People are thus offered alternative forums in which to express their political views, largely bypassing – for the moment – political parties and parliamentarians.

Declining voter turnout is a widely shared challenge. In most countries, legitimacy is conferred upon parliaments by elections, which give parliaments the authority to speak on behalf of the people. Where voter turnout is low, parliament's claim to be the most representative voice in society can be challenged.

Declining voter turnout has been a global trend in recent decades. Having remained stable at 75 to 80 per cent between the 1950s and 1980s global turnout for parliamentary elections has since fallen to between 65 and 70 per cent. Even more worrying, the participation of young people is much lower than that of the overall population. Research suggests that people who vote in the first two elections after becoming eligible to vote are more likely to vote in subsequent elections. It is therefore especially important to understand why young people are voting less than other age groups and to address the causes identified.

Unequal power relations between the executive and legislative branches of government

The executive's role is to implement the political platform on which it gained power, responding to, and trying to shape, the political events of the day. Since it is in the interests of the executive to pursue its goals with the least obstruction possible, parliament is often perceived as a potential hurdle that needs to be managed. The executive, in other words, seeks to keep the balance of power in its own favour.

It has various means at its disposal. In countries with parliamentary systems of government – in particular though not exclusively – the executive can exercise control over the members of its political party (i.e. the majority party in parliament), with rewards for faithful support and sanctions for dissent. In the most extreme cases, parliament can be reduced to a "rubber-stamp" of popular approval for executive branch proposals. Even in long-established democracies, many question whether the balance of power has swung too far in favour of the executive.

In a large majority of countries, parliaments have the constitutional **right to initiate legislation**, yet most laws originate with the executive. Parliament's law-making role tends to focus on the scrutiny of executive proposals, with limited opportunities for individual parliamentarians.

The executive also often **controls the parliamentary agenda**, including if and when bills are scheduled for examination, a power often hard-wired into the political system. When the ruling party has a parliamentary majority, even though parliament may formally set its own agenda, control may remain in the hands of the executive.

Parliament's **power to hold government to account** lies at the heart of executive-legislative relations. And yet in practice, the members of a party in government have strong incentives not to challenge that government, such that the oversight function is typically left to opposition parties. Parliaments are therefore trying to develop systems that allow for effective oversight of the executive without the appearance of launching an "inquisition".

Institutional capacity and parliamentary reform

Linked to the theme of executive domination is the notion of institutional capacity – the people, skills and resources parliaments need to carry out their work effectively. The human and financial resources available to the executive exceed those of parliament by many orders of magnitude. The executive also has significantly better **access to information** than parliament, and can largely control the quantity and timing of information made available to parliament: with regard to national budget preparation and execution, for example.

In many countries, the capacity of the parliamentary administration to provide effective support for the work of parliament – such as non-partisan research in the interests of informed decision-making – is limited.

Globally, according to data collected for the 2012 Global Parliamentary Report, a relatively small percentage of state budgets (an average of 0.49 per cent) is allocated to parliament. Significant variations can be observed: parliament accounts for 0.08 per cent of the state budget in Pakistan, compared to 0.75 per cent in the Philippines.

Parliaments face the challenge of keeping up with changes in society, such as the use of technology to solicit input from citizens on issues under debate. In all parliaments, even the long established and well resourced, there is tension between the need to evolve in step with society and the desire to preserve traditions and working methods often forged through decades of hard-fought political battles.

The model for how many parliaments still function dates back to the late nineteenth century. Parliaments tend to be rather conservative institutions, and change tends to be slower and less coherent than many people would like to see. Capacity for reform depends very much on political circumstances, which can provide opportunities for change but also incentives to block

or delay it: for example, where electoral reforms might cost sitting members their seats.

Modern parliaments are increasingly attempting to become gender-sensitive. Beyond the simple presence of women in parliament, such efforts have included a more deep-rooted examination of parliamentary rules and processes to ensure that legislative work takes into account the needs of both women and men.

Political parties are a vital component of democratic governance. Parliaments represent citizens as individuals but also collectively, through political parties, to advance broad policy agendas. Parties serve both to focus electoral choices and to ensure that these choices are carried through into the work of parliament and the ongoing public debate. While not highly regarded by the public at large, political parties are indispensable to the working of a democratic parliament. Operating as they do in two spheres – government and civil society – they form an essential bridge between them.

Political parties also act as gatekeepers, determining to a large extent who can become candidates for electoral office. It also falls largely to them to ensure that opportunities are available for women and other sectors of society, including young people.

It is therefore important that parties have the capacity to develop policies in response to key challenges, so that voters can choose between a range of policy alternatives. This requires parties to be transparent in their rules and functioning. Political parties are weaker and less effective where based on personalities rather than policy platforms, and where powerful leadership trumps internal democracy.

A culture of democracy

As an ideal, democracy requires that members of society treat each other, and be treated, as equals. Underlying democracy is acceptance and respect of the other. Democratic life entails the right to and respect for differing views as well as dialogue as a solution to conflict.

Political tolerance is thus a vital element of democratic culture. It is the responsibility of all citizens, including political leaders, to practice political tolerance in their words and actions. Intolerance represents a threat to democracy since it discriminates against and may even silence certain parts of the population. Developing a culture of tolerance, however, takes time, and such ingredients as freedom of expression, civic education and pluralistic media reflecting diverse and critical points of view.

Concerns are regularly voiced about **the influence of money in politics**. This touches on many issues, from the financing of election campaigns and political parties to the impact of lobbying on decision-making. Ethics in parliamentary life is a matter of ongoing debate, and many parliaments have introduced codes of conduct for parliamentarians in an attempt to clarify the relevant rights and responsibilities.

The composition of parliament

Linked to both public scepticism and institutional effectiveness is the composition of parliament. **Historically, parliament has been a male-dominated institution** in all countries of the world. That is changing, though at different rates in different countries. Only three parliaments have achieved gender parity. Another 10 have more than 40 per cent women. This is the result of changing societal attitudes about the role of women, but also policies, such as electoral quotas to increase the number of women in parliament. But for most parliaments, gender parity remains a distant goal. The global average for women's participation in parliament, as of January 2015, was only 22.1 per cent.

Few people would argue that the composition of parliament should mirror exactly the composition of society. But it is widely understood that a parliament in which one sector of society – older men – holds a disproportionate amount of power will struggle to be effective in representing the views of society at large.

The equal presence of women is a powerful symbol. So is the equitable representation of young people, minorities and other marginalized groups. Such representation brings a greater diversity of views to the decision-making process, and legislative outcomes more broadly aligned with the interests of all sectors of society. The presence of representatives from different social groups is also important. There is a growing trend in many countries towards **the "professionalization" of politics**, with people spending their entire professional careers, in different capacities, within the political domain, including as members of parliament. This reinforces public perceptions of a political elite cut off from the concerns of most citizens.

Conclusion: revitalizing the model of representative democracy

Through its work in setting standards and capacity building, IPU supports parliaments in their efforts to build strong institutions that are resilient as well as responsive to the people's needs.

Parliaments are keenly aware of the challenges they face. Many of the challenges are deep-rooted and extend beyond the scope of parliamentary action. Some will test the boundaries of what any political action can achieve.

In the experience of parliaments around the world, a wide range of responses have proven effective and can usefully be shared with all parliaments. Recommended actions to strengthen parliament and democracy include:

- promoting the development of democratic culture in society, and underscoring the importance of political tolerance in the parliamentary arena;
- investing more in civic and political education for children in schools;
- making concerted efforts to encourage people, especially young people, to vote;
- making a public commitment to the core values of a

democratic parliament – one that is representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective – and putting these values into practice;

- ensuring that parliament is gender-sensitive in its rules, processes and legislative work;
- enhancing the power and ability of parliament to oversee the executive on behalf of the people;
- systematically monitoring public perceptions of parliament, seeking to understand the reasons for such perceptions and how they can be improved;
- adopting special measures to ensure the composition of parliament is more reflective of the composition of society as a whole, notably with regard to the number of women in parliament;
- insisting on the need for vibrant internal democracy within political parties;
- experimenting with new forms of public participation in decision-making and budgeting;
- providing more and better support to parliaments that wish to build institutional capacity, in line with the Common Principles for Support to Parliaments;
- democratizing the system of international relations, enhancing the role of parliaments vis-à-vis the issues that are high on the global agenda, and further developing the parliamentary dimension of the work of the United Nations.

IV. Mainstreaming gender equality into the work of parliaments

The Declaration of the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2010 reaffirmed the need to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. It committed to working to achieve a world average of 30% of women in parliaments by 2015.

Throughout the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, due attention has been paid to mainstreaming gender equality into all aspects relating to the organization, as well as content and outputs of the Conference. The current paper aims to map progress made in achieving gender equality in politics since the 2010 Speakers' Conference, highlighting remaining challenges and opportunities.

Gender equality, democracy and the IPU

Gender equality is at the heart of democratic processes. Very early on, the IPU highlighted the direct link between democracy and the balanced participation of men and women in politics, in particular in parliament. The IPU has consistently championed the need for democracy to include half of the world's population and respond to the needs of both men and women. Only then can democracy be considered truly representative and sustainable.

The advancement of gender equality is one of the key objectives set out in the IPU's strategy for 2012–2017. Through this strategy, the organization demonstrates its commitment to achieving the equal participation of men and women in politics and upholding respect for women's rights and gender equality. In particular, the IPU aims to:

1. increase the number of women in parliament worldwide;
2. support and enhance women parliamentarians' contribution to the work of parliament; and
3. strengthen parliament's capacity to mainstream gender equality into its work and defend women's rights issues.

The achievement of gender equality requires action on two fronts: (1) addressing discrimination against women and supporting women's empowerment; and (2) ensuring that the objective of gender equality is taken into account in a cross-

cutting and systematic way. The Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament is invited to address the question of equality in politics and to mainstream the gender equality objective throughout its proceedings and results.

Women in parliament – how much progress? Lessons learned

The Declaration of the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2010 reaffirmed the need to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. It further stated that the proportion of women in parliament was insufficient and pledged to step up efforts to reach, as a global average, the internationally agreed target of 30 per cent of women in parliaments by 2015. This meant committing to taking action to combat all forms of discrimination against women, which prevent them from realizing their aspirations to greater involvement in public life.

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. In 1995, when the Fourth World Conference of Women was held, women held a mere 11.3 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats. That percentage has almost doubled in 2015, up from 18.8 per cent in 2010. While progress has been achieved, the 30 per cent target still has not been met.

Progress has been made in almost 90 per cent of the world's countries. By 2015, there were 42 single or lower houses of

In 2015, the global average of women in parliaments is only 22 per cent. In 1985, it was 11 per cent. While there has been progress, at this pace it will take several decades to realize gender equality in parliaments.
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parliament where women occupied more than 30 per cent of the seats, compared to only 12 just 20 years ago. The share of women has surpassed 50 per cent, for the first time ever, in three houses of parliament, and exceeds 60 per cent in one (Rwanda). The world's highest-ranking countries have become a more diverse group: the top 10, of which eight were European countries in 1995, now comprise four in sub-Saharan Africa, three in Europe and three in the Americas. However, the pace of progress remains too slow. In 2014, women parliamentarians increased their share of parliamentary seats by just 0.3 percentage points, which is a cause for concern.

Three elements are common to the countries where women hold more than 30 per cent of the parliamentary seats:

- most have a proportional list system;
- most have implemented some sort of special measure to promote women in politics, whether in the form of legislated or voluntary quotas; and
- many have recently undergone a transition and have taken advantage of reform to address past discrimination and challenges and adopt legal frameworks that facilitate women's political participation on an equal footing with men.

Parliaments need to consider all opportunities to pursue progress and meet the average global target of 30 per cent of women members in parliament by 2020.

Reforming legal frameworks to eliminate discrimination and support women's access to politics

Experience has shown that electoral systems do matter, special temporary measures are crucial and political momentum and opportunities for change ought not to be missed. Legal reform is a key starting point. Today, over 100 countries have implemented systems of electoral gender quotas to support the achievement of equality in politics. Several countries have gone an extra step and established parity in politics as a target. Ambitious and proactive action will go a long way towards securing a more inclusive decision-making process, which is at the heart of democracy.

Inclusiveness should be the second objective of legal reform. The aim should be parity and the representation of all women, from all walks of life. 2014 IPU studies have demonstrated that women from ethnic minorities are almost completely marginalized in politics. In contrast, the share of minority men in politics seems to be largely proportional to their proportion in society. Similarly, the 2014 IPU report on youth participation in national parliaments shows that women under the age of 45 were by far the least represented in national parliaments, at 8 per cent, compared to young men and older women, at 16 per cent each. Therein lies an untapped potential for progress.

For the past five years, the IPU has developed and implemented programmes of support to assist parliaments in reviewing their legal frameworks and implementing electoral reforms that are more conducive to an equal participation of men and women. It has done so in countries with a low percentage of women MPs as well as in countries in transition. The IPU has complemented

this action with sensitization initiatives, producing awareness-raising tools and supporting MPs in leading campaigns to address stereotypes and change mentalities.

More generally, the IPU believes that progress will be achieved by addressing inequality as a whole. In order to provide a more conducive framework for women's political participation, it is crucial to ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men and do not face discrimination. Addressing the particular issue of violence against women is also a priority. For as long as women live in fear and are victims of violence, they will not be in a position to fully contribute to society's development. Progress will also require investing in women's economic empowerment, which is at the heart of all efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and sustainable development.

With this in mind, the IPU has implemented many capacity-building projects to address discrimination in the law, supporting parliaments to meet their obligations set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The IPU has implemented national projects and initiatives in support of parliaments and their members – men and women – in developing laws to combat violence against women and overseeing their effective enforcement. Efforts have also been deployed to build parliaments' capacity to facilitate women's access to health care, especially maternal and child health care.

Lessons learned:

- Addressing discrimination in law and building a legal framework that is conducive to an equal participation of men and women in politics is key.
- Positive action measures have proven their effectiveness; the more ambitious they are the greater their impact on gender equality.
- Untapped potentials (underrepresented groups) should be specifically targeted as a way to ensure a more inclusive and equal political process.
- Building an environment where women are autonomous and free from discrimination and violence is at the heart of progress, and parliaments should make this a priority. Specific attention should be paid to supporting initiatives aimed at empowering women in economic terms.

Supporting women's overall empowerment – a necessary investment

Empowerment is crucial to facilitating women's access to politics and enhancing their impact in this field. Politics requires knowledge and skills, mentors and supporters, networks and funds. These are more often than not inaccessible to women. Well thought-out electoral processes that facilitate the election of women, training and financial incentives for women candidates, and access to media ahead of elections are all important to empowering women in political participation.

Key to the empowerment of women is mentorship and solidarity, which must be further facilitated. Political life is attracting more women and many women politicians have served as role models,

which has been pivotal in opening up politics to aspiring women. Platforms created by women, such as women's parliamentary caucuses, can be used for enhancing solidarity among women, enriching their experiences and reinforcing their influence in politics. Whether at the national or international levels, more needs to be invested in these exchanges.

The IPU has been supporting women MPs in parliament through the implementation of capacity-building projects tailored to the needs of elected women. It has supported the creation of cross-party women's caucuses in parliaments. It has also facilitated sharing of knowledge and mentorship with the use of web-based platforms such as iKNOWPolitics (www.iknowpolitics.org – a network set up by IDEA, IPU, NDI, UNDP and UN Women). Furthermore, 30 years ago, the IPU created the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, which meets every six months and brings women MPs from around the world to strategize together. This forum has enabled women to have their space of influence and to effect change within the organization. In 2015, the IPU celebrated the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians by adopting a Call for Action, asking MPs to use their power for women's power (www.ipu.org/conf-e/132/cfa-e.pdf)

Lessons learned:

- Women MPs face new challenges and should benefit from targeted support to build their capacity and influence.
- Mechanisms and structures that facilitate solidarity and mentorship between women are powerful instruments of change and should be supported.

Building gender-sensitive processes and institutions

Political institutions and parliaments have historically functioned to meet the needs and interests of men. Leadership, rules, procedures, working hours and everything that makes a parliament a place of work must be suited to the needs and expectations of both men and women.

Parliaments need to embark on reform and become gender-sensitive institutions that respect and deliver on gender equality. In 2012, the IPU adopted a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments (www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/action-gender-e.pdf). According to the plan, a gender-sensitive parliament is one that:

- promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures;
- develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context;
- mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
- fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of members of parliament – men and women – to balance work and family responsibilities;
- acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality;
- encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality;
- equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages

the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

The IPU has supported parliaments in carrying out self-assessment exercises to gauge their degree of gender sensitivity and identify areas for progress. It has supported parliaments in implementing plans of action and provided training sessions to facilitate gender mainstreaming in parliament.

Lessons learned:

- Gender-sensitive institutions are more efficient institutions that better respond to the needs of men and women.
- Gender sensitive self-assessments go a long way towards identifying gaps and areas for improvement to achieve gender equality in and by parliaments.
- Parliaments should ensure that their efforts to build capacity include a gender dimension.

Developing partnerships

The responsibility of change should not lie on women's shoulders only. Gender equality is the responsibility of all and progress will only be achieved if everyone plays their part. Many stakeholders have yet to meet their responsibility and fully play their role in achieving gender equality.

Political parties should become more gender-sensitive in their composition, functioning and programmes. They need to provide greater opportunities to ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making. They need to be held accountable for achieving gender equality.

Partnership with men politicians also remains today a lost opportunity for women's full and equal participation. Men politicians are the majority of decision-makers in the world today. Without their engagement on women's rights and gender equality, all efforts to enhance women's participation are hindered. We definitely need to work more to promote among men and boys a new social construct of relationships built on respect and equality.

Other partnerships need to be strengthened between parliaments, civil society and grass-roots women's organizations; with the media to educate, raise awareness and stop perpetuating stereotypes and gender inequalities; and between organizations that support parliaments, such as the IPU and UN Women.

Lessons learned:

- Parliaments should build creative partnerships for gender equality and reach out in particular to men.
- Political parties should be challenged to fully play their role in meeting gender equality objectives.

The role of the IPU

The IPU's commitment to gender equality is long-standing. The IPU began working in the field of women's political participation back in the 1970s, making the link between democracy and a balanced participation of men and women in political processes. It has since implemented a strong programme of support which conducts research and implements projects of assistance to women and parliaments. In parallel, the IPU has also taken the lead in reforming its own structures and paving the way for a stronger participation of women. The IPU has reviewed its functioning and rules to include gender targets and quotas. It implements internal quotas for women in elected positions and sanctions for delegations that do not include representatives of both sexes.

Women parliamentarians constitute on average 30 per cent of delegates attending IPU Assemblies. The IPU's Meeting of Women Parliamentarians and Gender Partnership Group oversees and provides guidance to the work of the IPU in the area of gender equality. IPU Assemblies held every six months allow for the close monitoring and input of MPs to the programme work of the organization and mechanisms have been put into place to enable for gender to be mainstreamed in all IPU resolutions. Hearings with delegations from countries with few or no women in parliament allow the IPU to closely monitor and support change.

In 2013, the IPU adopted a policy document entitled *Gender mainstreaming at the IPU*, which sets a clear framework for ensuring that gender is taken into account in all of the IPU's work, whether at the political, programme or internal/Secretariat level.

In October 2014, the 131st IPU Assembly debated Achieving Gender Equality, Ending Violence Against Women. The Assembly's outcome document sets the ambitious target of achieving gender equality within one generation – by 2030. It calls for the political commitment and action of all political bodies and their leaders, starting with parliaments. To this end:

- international organizations should be held accountable for achieving gender equality and should mainstream gender within their work and structures; and
- political mobilization should be sustained and ambitious targets set – such as achieving gender equality within one generation – by 2030.

Inaugural speeches

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, IPU President

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General,
H.E. Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of UN General Assembly,
Hon. Speakers of Parliament, Hon. Members of Parliament
Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General,
Mr. Forest Whitaker, Special Guest
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

Let me begin by extending a very special and warm welcome to all the Speakers of Parliament from around the world present here today at UN Headquarters in New York for this landmark five-yearly conference.

I would like to say a special word of thanks to our gracious hosts and valued partner, the United Nations, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Congratulations! Mr. Secretary-General, allow me to express how much we value the growing cooperation between the UN system, parliaments and the IPU.

The First World Conference took place in 2000 on eve of the Millennium Summit and through the subsequent Millennium Declaration, the Heads of State and Government acknowledged for the first time the importance of strong cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments in all areas, through the IPU as their world organization.

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On the other hand, while parliaments and generally other stakeholders were not really involved in the global conversation leading up to the MDGs 15 years ago, this time our conference is the culmination of two intense years of parliamentary engagement on what the parliamentary community expects to see in the SDGs.

Now that we have been involved in the framing and articulation of the post-2015 development agenda, we must play a robust role in the implementation of the new commitments.

Our institutional relationship with the United Nations has also evolved greatly since our last meeting five years ago – we would like to acknowledge the major role the United Nations Secretary-General himself has played in this process. We very much look forward to signing soon the new Cooperation Agreement between the IPU and the United Nations, which takes stock of the progress achieved over the years and aspires to place our cooperation on a deeper and stronger footing.

Together with the UN General Assembly and other UN bodies we have developed a number of mechanisms such as the annual Parliamentary Hearing. We have ourselves at the IPU also set up a Committee on UN Affairs to bring a parliamentary component to major UN processes. We look forward to further strengthening these mechanisms.

It is a common focus on people and their security and well-being that bring IPU and the United Nations together as natural partners. Preamble to the UN Charter begins with the words “We the peoples of the United Nations” and the IPU as the world organization of parliaments represents the elected institutions and representatives of the people.

Honourable Speakers, Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet here at a time when the world is at crossroads – half the global population live on less than US\$2.50 a day and it is estimated that 1.2 billion people are affected by some form of violence or insecurity.

A quick glance at the world’s balance sheet will show that whilst there has been clear and definitive progress in some areas, thanks in part to the MDGs, the overall picture is one of deficit. Worryingly, the negative trend is more pronounced. Climate change, more frequent and intense disasters, living beyond planetary boundaries, growing inequalities all threaten to undermine progress and hold us back.

2015 is the year when major United Nations processes are moving to culmination. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was agreed in March of this year, SDGs to succeed the MDGs will be agreed upon in less than a month in this very hall and in December we have the critical climate change meetings in Paris. We thus have a once a lifetime opportunity to get it right and steer the world towards a sustainable, peaceful and safer course.

The theme of our draft Outcome Declaration: Placing Democracy at the Service of Peace and Sustainable Development: Building the World the People Want captures and articulates this challenge and opportunity.

So how is this speakers’ conference different from other events and meetings that take place at the United Nations? Is our conference also going to be about making pledges? What sets this conference apart is that we are meeting here to ensure that promises our governments make, are kept.

With the SDGs, the global community will soon adopt the most ambitious undertaking ever, to create a new and transformative reality for our world. It is a vision of a brave new world by 2030 which will leave no one behind based on its 17 goals and 169 targets.

Fifteen years back, our governments also tried to create a new reality but issues of governance and accountability were largely absent in the planning and execution. This time round, it is thankfully different.

The SDGs will be the first ever major UN agreement to include specific action on governance. Effective, accountable, representative institutions will be the engines to drive the implementation of the SDGs.

As you are all aware, the IPU has been seeking your support for the inclusion of a strong reference to the role of parliaments in the SDGs declaration. Many of you have reached out to your government in underscoring this message and I wish to thank you for the great support.

Our efforts have not gone in vain and the draft political declaration accompanying the SDGs clearly acknowledges the “essential role of national parliaments”.

As the institution which is constitutionally mandated to hold government to account, to enact legislation and ensure their application, to appropriate resources through the budgetary process to meet goals, parliaments have a unique responsibility and role. It would thus not be an understatement to say that parliaments will be critical to success of the SDGs.

The other point I would like to emphasize is that the SDGs lay out through its goals and targets where our destination is. The indicators to evaluate progress will have us to correct the course as needed. But the goals do not tell us what we need to do to reach our destination.

There is no one size that fits all and parliaments will have to debate and come up with their own policy solutions. Strong ownership and buy-in to the SDGs will be critical. Let us not underestimate our mandate and ability to effect qualitative change on every aspect of people’s lives. This power has to be tapped into deeper and more extensively than ever before.

You as Speakers of Parliaments are the guardians and custodians of elected representatives. How effective your MPs and parliaments are is determined not by the grandeur of the

parliament buildings or by the extensive rules of procedure that determine conduct of business but rather by your commitment and your ability to lead and inspire change.

People and planet have to come first as never before. We need to think out of the box. Business as usual when it comes to our economic model and system of governance will not deliver the SDGs.

Political reform and leadership will be essential to success and as leaders of national parliaments, remember that you have the ability, and the mandate, to fashion the political change that is necessary.

This however is a steep challenge and will test us to our limits. Not all parliaments are ready for the enormous challenge that awaits them. As national leaders in your own countries, Speakers will need to ensure that their Parliaments are fit for purpose.

Strong parliaments provide a sound foundation for democracy and peace – both of which are pre-conditions for development.

While the overarching theme of our conference will focus on the SDGs, we must not lose sight of other pressing challenges that all parliaments and indeed the world at large is facing today.

We know all too well that young people have all but given up on politics. We need to reach out and engage them more meaningfully in the political process. We must let them know that their voice counts and that we value their views. There is also a waning of trust in politics generally and some question whether politics as practised today is part of the problem.

Terrorism is rearing its ugly head as never before. Instead of the peaceful world our founding fathers aspired to at the inception of the IPU, we find ourselves immersed in conflict characterized by unspeakable atrocities and women and children bear the brunt of these.

Honourable Speakers, Parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen,

We have a rich and varied programme ahead of us over the next few days. As you know, each Speaker will have a chance to address the general debate, starting today.

Tomorrow, in parallel with the general debate, there will be two panel discussions: on parliamentary oversight and the SDGs. This conference will also offer us all a valuable forum for networking through bilateral meetings and informal exchanges in the corridors.

Let me conclude by saying that the times we live in are extraordinary for the complexity of the challenges that confront us – poverty, conflict, financial crisis, terrorism, migration, climate change, disasters, environmental degradation.

The reality of globalization is that we are all part of a global village and no country is an island. Borders between us are in many respects virtual in that conditions in each country spill over and impact on every other.

Solutions will only be found if we work together on tackling the challenges and this conference will, I hope, mark the moment when the global parliamentary community comes together, finds common ground and provides the impetus for action through leadership and bold vision.

The IPU is urging speakers, parliamentarians and parliaments to commit to concerted action, lead the drive for change and to put people – our constituents – at the heart of our efforts. The people have placed their trust in us by voting us into high office. It is now our turn to serve them well, fulfil our responsibilities and be deserving of the trust they have reposed on us. I wish us all a very successful Speakers' Conference.

Thank you.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

It is a great honour and pleasure to address the distinguished speakers of the world's parliaments. You stand for peace. You stand for democracy. You are the embodiment of the opening words of the United Nations Charter: "We, the peoples."

You meet for the first time in five years, at a moment when the world is gripped by multiple crises, more people have been displaced by conflict than at any time since the Second World War, and climate change increasingly threatens our well-being.

Perhaps most important given your role, this is also a period when governance structures in many parts of the world are facing a crisis of legitimacy, representation and participation.

We are being challenged to strengthen our collective resolve to promote peace and security, sustainable development and human rights around the world.

Earlier this month, Member States took a bold step in this direction by concluding negotiations on an ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals that form the basis of this agenda are people-centred and planet-sensitive. They provide a plan of action for ending poverty and hunger, and a roadmap for building a life of dignity for all. They promise to "leave no one behind."

I commend you, as parliamentarians of the world, and your organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for the valuable role you played in shaping this new framework. Your contribution to its implementation will be equally critical in ensuring that the agenda is translated from the global to the national. People will

look to you to hold your governments accountable for achieving the goals, and to write the laws and invest in the programmes that will make them a reality.

People want education, health care and more job opportunities. They want to live without fear. They want to be able to trust their governments and institutions. They want full respect for their human rights and they are rightly demanding a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 addresses democracy by calling for inclusive and participatory societies and institutions. But democratic principles also run through the entire document like a silver thread, from universal access to resources, health care and education to decent work opportunities for all.

The task of implementing and monitoring these goals is huge. It requires states to work in strong and close partnership with civil society of all stripes. This has never been more important. And yet, for civil society, freedom to operate is diminishing – or even disappearing.

Dozens of governments have adopted restrictions that limit the ability of NGOs to work, or to receive funding, or both. As we embark on this new agenda, the state and civil society can and should be partners in building the future we want.

The declaration that you will adopt at this conference outlines your responsibilities in translating the voices of the people into meaningful action.

I am pleased that it includes strong commitments to ending gender-based violence and achieving gender equality. I continue



to advocate not only for the protection of women and girls, but for their full empowerment. That includes among your own ranks as parliamentarians! We cannot fulfil 100 per cent of the world's potential by excluding 50 per cent of the world's people: women.

Last month, Member States met in Addis Ababa to adopt a far-reaching framework for financing sustainable development.

Next month, world leaders will come together at the United Nations to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In December of this year, in Paris, France, Member States are coming to Paris seeking to adopt a global climate agreement. All around the world, citizens and forward-thinking business leaders are demanding low-carbon, climate-resilient growth. There is growing awareness that there are tremendous opportunities for countries and companies that take the lead in developing clean energy technologies and markets.

This Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament can help sustain this momentum.

We at the United Nations value our deepening cooperation with you and with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

I look forward to working closely with you in the crucial period ahead.

Let us work together to make this world better for all where all the people of the world can enjoy their human dignity and well-being. And I thank you and I count on your continuing engagement and leadership and commitment.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Sam K. Kutesa, President of the General Assembly of the United Nations

Right Honourable Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,
Right Honourable Speakers of Parliament,
Excellencies,
Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. I extend a warm welcome to the many Honourable Speakers of Parliament who have joined us today.

This Conference is taking place at an important juncture during this momentous year. We gather in this general assembly hall, just one day before Member States are due to take action on a draft resolution to transmit the agreed outcome document entitled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* to the Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.

This ambitious development framework, which is the result of nearly two years of preparatory work and intense negotiations, represents a historic opportunity to change our world for the better. Through the eradication of poverty, improvement of

livelihoods for all and achievement of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, we can realize prosperity and protect our planet.

The contributions and input of parliamentarians, local authorities, civil society and academia, among other stakeholders, were all instrumental in formulating this transformative agenda that will guide our development efforts for the next 15 years.

Members of parliaments provided particularly insightful contributions, owing to their unique perspectives on the needs of citizens, the specific circumstances of their respective countries, as well as the capabilities of governments to meet development aspirations.

Given their role as pillars of democratic governance, parliaments will also have an important role in the implementation of the new development agenda.

Parliamentarians should continue to ensure that the voices of the people are heard and included in the development process. This will enhance ownership of the new agenda and its implementation on the ground, which will be vital for its success.



Through their oversight function, parliaments also promote accountability of development commitments, appropriate budgetary resources, and ensure that the necessary legislative frameworks are in place.

Right Honourable Speakers of Parliament,

The successful implementation of the post-2015 development agenda will depend on a number of critical factors, including integrating it in respective national development plans, and mobilizing adequate financial, technological and capacity building resources.

It will be essential to carry forward the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have been incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, greater attention will be needed in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation, advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, and creation of employment, among others.

While the number of women parliamentarians continues to increase worldwide, greater efforts will be required going forward, to reach the internationally-agreed target of 30 per cent of female parliamentarians by 2020.

Furthermore, we must work together to educate, empower and employ the youth. As governments adopt legal and policy frameworks that seek to adequately respond to the needs and aspirations of the youth, we should do more to harness the contribution by the youth to sustainable development. We should also take concerted steps to engage young people in democratic processes.

Finally, parliamentarians worldwide have a critical role to play in the protection and preservation of the environment, including through enacting appropriate legislation. As we work toward reaching a new, universally binding climate change agreement at the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP 21) in Paris this December, bold commitments that will protect our planet for generations to come are needed. Parliamentarians and other stakeholders should remain actively engaged in collective efforts towards this noble goal.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr. Forest Whitaker, actor and humanist, UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation

Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Your Excellency President Kutesa,
Your Excellency President Chowdhury,
Your Excellencies Speakers of Parliament,
Secretary-General Chungong,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a tremendous honour to stand before this distinguished group of legislators and leaders and to be able to connect with all of you this morning. I know the importance of the work that awaits you over these next three days, and I am humbled to have been included in this conference. Thank you to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to President Chowdhury and Secretary-General Chungong, for this invitation.

As speakers of parliament, you are playing a critical role in democracies across the planet at a time when extraordinary action is required of the global community. I have devoted the last ten years of my life to working with young people around the world, to developing their skills as peace leaders and community builders. These youth are our present and our future. And our laws may reflect this thought. In my capacity as UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, I've had the opportunity to hear the voices and listen to the stories of young women and men from all sorts of backgrounds, cultures, communities, and countries. What they share is a deep and widespread discontentment with the political status quo. Around the world, youths are struggling to define their identities and discover their purposes. Many of them feel marginalized, like they don't have a place in society or that their voices aren't being heard. Some are angry; they feel that violence and extremism are their only recourse.

I see this in my own country, where too many times in recent years, this anger has been channelled into shootings and even bombings. I see this anger in the Middle East, where ISIS is committing acts of terror and attempting to radicalize an entire generation. Of course, all violence and terrorism must be condemned in the strictest of terms and eliminated without exception. But these are a sign of a broader problem. They are a symptom of a society where people are giving up hope.

You – the most powerful lawmakers and leaders in your nations – you have the ability to change this. The word parliament comes from the French verb *parler*, “to speak.” You need to speak for people all around the world who are not being heard – for former child soldiers in Uganda, South Sudan and Myanmar; for gang members in Mexico and the United States; for orphans in Syria and many other countries around the world. You have to help these people find their way so they can stand strong in their identities. You have to demonstrate that everyone matters, and that every person in your democracy has power and efficacy. You have to convince them to hope again.

You know, when I was a kid, I used to spend a lot of time on my grandfather's farm. Sometimes he would make me plough the field. This was an actual push plough; there was no horse, just my own two hands. And once the field was ploughed, my grandfather would tell me where to plant the seeds. “Here you plant watermelon, here turnips, here tomatoes.” And then



I would have to care for the seeds. If it was cold, I'd need to make sure the ground was covered. I had to chase away birds. I watered the soil. And if I did all these things, then by the end of the season, I would have a field full of these beautiful crops. But if I neglected the seeds, if I forgot to water them or I didn't use the right fertilizer or planted them at the wrong depth, then the field would be covered with weeds. And I'd have to get down on my hands and knees and choke out the weeds by their roots, and start the whole process all over again.

Inside every young person, there exists a single, precious seed. It carries a unique energy and identity. If we nourish those seeds – if we ensure that young people have enough to eat, that they receive proper educations, that there are jobs available in their communities where they can make an honest living so they can fulfil their basic human needs, if we can help them find their purpose and make sure their voices are heard – then the true identity of those seeds will blossom, and beautiful flowers and crops will reveal themselves in fields and gardens all over the world.

But if we fail to do this, if we neglect to care for these young women and men, then we allow the weeds to take root. These weeds are stubborn; they can grow anywhere. Violence, extremism, racism and intolerance are weeds that can sprout through cracks in any sidewalk. They can penetrate the walls of any seed and corrupt its very identity.

There were some years on my grandfather's farm when the weeds would take over. They would grow too thick, and I'd have no choice but to wait till the next season to replant.

But we can't wait. We can't give up on the current generation and simply try again on the next one. We have to nurture these young women and men now. We must all be farmers and gardeners. Every single man and woman can play a role in shaping a world where our children grow up knowing that they are cared about and that there is a place for them. It is so much easier to devote our days to caring for and educating the next generation of leaders, rather than getting down on our hands and knees and spending an eternity pulling up weeds.

And you, as speakers of parliament – as our most experienced leaders – you have to lead these efforts.

You have some of the most beautiful jobs on the planet. With the laws you pass, you are shaping the very movement, the ebb and flow, of your countries and your cultures. The smallest laws and policymaking decisions – even those that local leaders make – can have powerful impacts. A simple traffic sign that says you can't turn right, or a fence you construct around a parking lot, can cause ripples that make a difference in people's lives. These things create boundaries and structure. Local leaders are in effect saying to people, "Yes, this place is for you; no, this place is off limits." A single drop of water cannot sustain a plant. But many drops, over time, are the difference between life and death.

And you legislate on a much larger scale, at the national level. Every law you pass affects tens of thousands, or even millions

of people. Think about the power that gives you to care for and nurture the seeds of identity that exist inside of the youth of the world. Your laws cause ripples and waves that can nourish an entire generation. You have the ability to plough and to fertilize, to clip and to prune. You can make those seeds blossom in every field on the planet.

I have witnessed the extraordinary transformations that occur when you nurture young men and women's potential and help them find their identity. My foundation works with a school in northern Uganda called Hope North. This place is a sanctuary, a home for former child soldiers, refugees, and orphans whose worlds have been shattered by war and violence. Hope North is a place where these children can seek refuge, somewhere they can be made whole again. It is a place where from the scorched earth of war, life can spring anew.

There's one boy in particular we've worked with there whose story has stayed with me. When he arrived years ago at Hope North, you could see this emptiness in his eyes. For so many years, this boy had been forced to be a soldier. And even though he had spent sleepless nights haunted by the memories of what he had done, the very act of being a soldier had given his life purpose. Now he was safe, but he was also lost. The emptiness in his eyes revealed his lack of purpose. Without care and attention, this boy's life easily could have devolved into further violence and isolation. But in this community, where he was being supported and nurtured, the light started to come back to his eyes. I watched him one day singing with his fellow classmates, and I could see that as these many voices came together as one, the harmony created waves that washed over the boy that gave him purpose and nourished his soul. And this newfound identity has transformed his life. Last year he opened his own electrical shop. The last time we spoke, he expressed his plans to franchise three more shops in the surrounding villages. He has become a leader and a role model in this community.

With a little love and nurturing, a seed will fulfil its potential and express its true self. There are so many initiatives and sustainable goals that parliaments around the world should pursue to promote social welfare and to give youths the tools that allow them to find their identities.

Parliaments must help ensure that every boy and girl receives a quality education. A human being has the same need for education that a plant has for water. You cannot thrive if you are not allowed to learn. In South Sudan, where many young people around the country have been taking up arms and fighting in a civil war, my foundation jointly with UNESCO and partners works with youth to educate and train them as conflict mediators and community builders. We are already seeing how this is shaping these young men and women's lives. There's one young man in our programme whose parents were killed when he was only seven, and he spent his childhood living in displaced persons camps. Now, he's finding his purpose working to build peace in his community, and he's about to transform his life further when he starts university this year.

Two other young men from our programme in South Sudan, through this training and education, have heard this same call to service, and now their identities as community leaders are continuing to blossom; they have just been elected to parliament from Eastern Equatoria State. They will be engaging in the same type of work that all of you perform – shaping the ebb and flow of their cultures with the laws they pass. Over the coming months, the parliament in South Sudan must ratify the peace agreement signed last week by leaders in Juba. Legislators must work together to make this peace a reality, to create programs that support and reintegrate the 10,000 children who have been forced to serve as soldiers in this conflict. They must craft laws that stamp out harmful cultural practices and promote tolerance and reconciliation.

Parliaments around the world must leverage the power of technology to allow people to express themselves and to bring people together. The Internet gives voice to the voiceless. It allows every person on the planet to proclaim, “Here I am. I matter.” I have seen the wonder on a young person’s face when she accesses the Internet for the first time and discovers a whole world of possibilities waiting for her. But as of 2014, only 32 per cent of individuals in developing countries had access to the Internet. Increasing this technology’s prevalence around the world would be a tremendous tool in allowing young men and women to learn, to seek out communities, and to find their identities.

And, parliaments must empower women and other groups whose voices are being silenced. Especially in fragile countries impacted by war and conflict, too many women are the victims of violence and sexual exploitation. There’s a young woman we work with and trained in Uganda. She’s endured some of the most horrific things imaginable: she was captured by soldiers and forced to kill her sister. She was raped as a weapon of war. And then she had to learn to love the child – a daughter – that was born to her through this terrible ordeal. I’m sure you’ve all heard too many stories like hers.

But from this death and destruction has sprung new life. Because when she was offered fertile ground – when she was given a safe place to live, when she received an education and was trained as a peacebuilder – this woman found her identity. She’s started her own business selling purses to people all around the globe. Now, she’s raising her daughter – born from the chaos and fury of war – and, like mothers around the planet, she’s nurturing a new generation of men and women to believe that they can shape their own futures.

These are the people parliaments must serve. These are the seeds you must care for. No one should be left behind.

You assembled here today come from over 150 nations. You represent a diverse and beautiful mix of nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and peoples. I understand that the political states of your nations – the ways you govern and the exact policies that you pursue – are unique to each of you. But just as every plant requires water, sunshine and soil to grow, every person requires basic human rights that must be universally provided across all

nations. Securing these rights and promoting development are instruments of survival.

When the United Nations formally adopts 17 new Sustainable Development Goals in just a few days – at this very place – it will announce to the world the intention to ensure universal education, promote widespread Internet access, achieve gender equality, eradicate poverty, end hunger, reduce inequality, combat climate change, and more. These challenges illustrate the deep interdependence between the developed and the underdeveloped world. Whatever impacts one impacts all. We can no longer believe that our neighbour’s problems are not our own – that wars won’t spread, that refugees won’t cross borders, that poverty and extremism will stay where they are. Weeds can grow anywhere.

And that means that implementing the Sustainable Development Goals will require collective action. Addressing these massive challenges will take all of us – every country and every person – working together. You must be the men and women who lead us in these efforts, who make sure that we are fulfilling our sacred obligations to each other and coming together to build peace and sustainable development that all citizens of the world can share in. You must make sure that we care for the seeds inside of those who will inherit this world.

Imagine travelling to the banks of a mighty river. If you reach your hand into the water, you can hold, in your palm, a single drop, distinct and perfect. But then you turn over your hand, and that drop falls back into the current, where it joins with trillions of other drops that, together, make up a single entity, flowing as one toward the same end. And along its journey, that river will create life everywhere it flows – from the highest mountains to the harshest deserts.

We humans are those drops. Together, we are that river. Inseparable. A single entity, united in purpose.

Together, we can create the life we want. Our voices and our message can percolate to every corner of the world. Our good deeds can create waves that irrigate every field, and provide the love and nourishment and support that every single young woman and man needs to become the truest – the most beautiful – versions of themselves imaginable. Together, it is possible.

I want to thank you again for this opportunity to connect with you today. Thank you for working to ensure that every person’s voice is heard and for all that you do in support of peace and development around the globe.

Conference officers

President of the IPU

Mr. Saber Chowdhury

Secretary General of the IPU

Mr. Martin Chungong

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Mr. Zhang Dejiang	Chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China
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Ms. Sumitra Mahajan	Speaker of the Lok Sabha, India

Rapporteurs

Ms. Rebecca Kadaga	Speaker of the House of Representatives, Uganda
Mr. David Carter	Speaker of the House of Representatives, New Zealand
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Mr. Mark Wade	Speaker of the House of Representatives, Trinidad and Tobago



UN Secretary-General and IPU President and Secretary-General view the photo exhibit launched during the Fourth Conference.
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President

Mr. Saber Chowdhury President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. Martin Chungong

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

Mr. Michael Møller Director General, United Nations Office in Geneva

Special guests

Mr. Ban Ki-moon	Secretary-General of the United Nations
Mr. Sam K. Kutesa	President of UN General Assembly, Uganda
Mr. Forest Whitaker	UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation
Ms. Helen Clarke	UNDP Administrator
Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka	UN Women Executive Director
Mr. Mogens Lykketoft	Incoming President of the UN General Assembly, Denmark

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