



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

Senator Gabriela Cuevas Barrón

IPU President

Opening speech

**5th Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians
14-15 December- Baku, Azerbaijan**

Dear Chairman of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan,

Dear young parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today and to welcome you all to this 5th edition of the IPU's Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians.

Mr. Chairman, I would first and foremost wish to thank you and the Parliament of Azerbaijan for hosting this Conference. Azerbaijan is taking a leadership role in creating opportunities for youth and in promoting innovative solutions to current challenges. This Conference is another demonstration of your strong commitment to youth empowerment. We are meeting here while COP24 talks are on-going and decisions that impact our world and our planet are being taken. Every day, all of us take decisions. Every day we take a direction that is inspired by who we are, by what our education is, depending on our personality, our history but we also base our decisions on information that we have and advice that we receive.

Our decisions have impact, we know that. What we should know better and be aware of more is that our decisions have an impact on seven generations to come!

If we bear in mind that our decisions will resonate for seven generations to come, would they be the same? This is so simple and so powerful. If we bear it in mind to look at the world around us, we will quickly realize what our united efforts for political change need to focus on. The first is our planet. Human consumption is the primary cause of the unprecedented planetary change we are seeing today, through the continually increasing demand for energy, land, water and natural resources.

We all know the statistics. We are nowhere near reaching the 1.5 degree threshold committed to in the Paris Declaration on Climate Change. Actually we need to intensify our efforts five-fold to have a chance to meet this target. But looking beyond the statistics, we can all see the impact of environmental threats both for our planet, and for our everyday lives.

We are witnessing wildlife population falling by 60% in just over 40 years. We cannot even look seven generations ahead when it comes to our wildlife, because at this rate, it will all be gone in one generation.

Only a quarter of land on Earth is free of the impacts of human activities. Even wildlife, which is the key to human survival, like the bees needed to sustain our food production, is being reduced dramatically.

Marine and freshwater ecosystems are under attack: almost six billion tonnes of fish and invertebrates have disappeared from the world's oceans in the last six decades. Plastic pollution has invaded all major marine environments worldwide, from shorelines and surface waters down to the oceans' depths.

Let us make no mistake, our consumption habits and our economic systems are literally destroying the planet.

But we have the opportunity to choose the path ahead. Today, we still have a choice if we take informed decisions and if we face the situation with courage and determination.

We, as parliamentarians, as decision makers, need to make the right political, financial and consumer choices to realize the ultimate goal of humanity and nature that will thrive together. Our constituents, our youth, our children, depend on us and look for our leadership.

I hope that your deliberations will provide concrete, informed and courageous directions for all of us to follow.

I very much believe in the strengths of the young generation of politicians, in you all gathered here today, in your fresh ideas, in your vision of our world and of its future. You are the hope of democracy; you are the present and the future of global politics.

I have no doubt that the responses to today's and tomorrow's challenges cannot be found without youth. Empowering youth, amplifying their voice, ensuring they are part of all solutions is the way to go. I take up your slogan, the slogan of the young MPs of the IPU: No decisions about youth, without youth!

For this to become a reality and not just a wish, we have to support youth to develop knowledge, talents, skills but also inspirations and passions.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

Education transforms lives; it is the key to combating inequalities, eliminating gender discrimination, creating a sustainable planet, preventing conflicts and promoting peace.

Education must not be seen as an expense, but as an investment; perhaps the smartest one we can make. We are dealing with human-made problems, and education is the best human-made solution.

In a constantly changing world, our societies and parliaments need to adapt and rethink the way they work; today's challenges are different from yesterday's. We cannot respond with ideas, means and tools from the past. Education is also the key to unlocking the innovation needed to address modern challenges.

About 262 million children and youth were out of school during the last school year.

How can we, as MPs, make sure that education is first and foremost available to all and that it is also fit for today and the future? How can we ensure that education promotes equitable, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and supports transitions to green and digital economies? But how can we equally ensure that education leads to jobs, self-development but also well-being and sustainable prosperity.

All educational institutions, from primary schools, to universities, must prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. Do you realize that one of the highest jobs in demand these days is cybersecurity? This area barely existed a decade ago. Parliamentarians, and in particular young MPs, must be aware of this evolution and take the necessary action.

As things are rapidly evolving, the younger generations must be lifelong learners; they must constantly improve their skills to match the next generation of jobs. The workforce—that of today and that of

tomorrow—needs highly skilled workers. In addition to excellent technical skills, the labour market also demands soft skills, like working in teams, communications, and critical thinking.

I am counting on your vision, commitment and fresh ideas to guide us on how to make laws and policies that respond effectively to these needs. And not only for the needs of today's youth, but also for the needs of future generations.

It is certain that we are the generation that holds the fate of our planet in its hands. We are the last line of defence.

Yes, this burden may not have been of our making: it was handed down to us by former generations who may not have thought seven generations ahead. Yes, it is an incredibly heavy burden for one to carry. By turning this challenge on its head, will give us the opportunity to change the course of things. This is our opportunity to be remembered—maybe even seven generations from now—as the generation that saved the planet.

I am confident that we are up to the task!

Thank you.