

# Inaugural address by the IPU President at the 140<sup>th</sup> Assembly

Doha, 6 April 2019

Your Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, Your Excellency, Speaker of the Shura Council, IPU Secretary General, Mr. Voronkov, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, distinguished Speakers of Parliament and Honourable Parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, and let me be honest, dear friends,

It is my great honour to welcome you to this 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Doha. This year, the IPU celebrates its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is proof of the continued and important role that the global organization of parliaments has played in the turbulent times of the past century, and that it will continue to play into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also places a responsibility on us as parliamentarians to see humanity through the crises the world is facing today and to seek effective and sustainable solutions.

Before reflecting on the themes before us, I would like to thank, on behalf of us all, our host, the State of Qatar and the Shura Council, for organizing this Assembly. Impressively, close to 160 national parliaments, 76 Presiding Officers and over 1,600 delegates have gathered here in Doha to take stock of the major challenges facing the world today, to share experiences and good practices, and to help mobilize parliamentary action to address these challenges.

Today's world is full of contradictions. We have the best access to information through the internet; but we no longer know what is true and what is fake news. We are experiencing a fourth industrial revolution in production and consumption; but we still cannot provide enough food for all humanity. One is currently supposed to be less likely to die in an armed conflict than ever before; but terrorism is growing, and we are always feeling uncertain about our security. Green technology is now a fast-growing industry; but the latest reports on climate change tell us that our efforts to fight this phenomenon are not good enough. Apparently, technology is not going to save us; we need real political will.

On gender, we have at least some cause to celebrate. Over the last two years, the number of women elected to parliament has increased by one per cent. But at that rate, we would take 50 years to reach parity in all parliaments. And as for the figures for cabinets and heads of state or government, the presence of women is being threatened by many regressive interests.

The news is sadly not positive for young people, particularly in parliaments. Seventy-five per cent of countries do not allow people under 30 years old to stand for election. And while more than half of the total world population is younger than 30, only 1.9 per cent of parliamentarians are in this age group.

In terms of plurality, we now have huge opportunities to find out about other cultures, religions and ethnic groups. But at the same time, xenophobia and many different types of discrimination are on the rise, and hate-speech is becoming part of the political narrative. It seems that we are not learning the lessons of the last century.

Turning to global trade, e-commerce has made it very easy for us to exchange goods and services. But it is still easier for a cow or some kind of good to cross a border than it is for a person: we are not fully respecting people. And more broadly, we see globalization on the one hand but protectionism and isolationism on the other.

I will continue in my own language, because I also want to promote Spanish.

*[In Spanish]* The IPU will soon be 130 years old. Over the years, the Organization has witnessed the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War, how the climate has deteriorated, how we have been unable to look after our planet and how we have failed to include everyone fully. Of course, humanity has achieved great things. But at the same time, important governance challenges endure: building a more inclusive economy – an economy that leaves nobody behind – and tackling poverty, which currently affects a large part of humanity. That is where our Organization, on the brink of its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary, must start writing the best pages of its history. We have to fight for peace, stability and

dialogue, as was mentioned by His Highness. We do this through parliamentary diplomacy, which is how the IPU has brought parliaments together most effectively.

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends,

Threats are no less present today than in the past. That is why the world needs the IPU more than ever. The 46,000 MPs in our Member Parliaments represent almost everyone on this planet. We need to be capable of imagining what those 46,000 parliamentarians could achieve together in terms of speaking with one voice, sharing objectives, harmonizing legislation, fighting to implement solutions and making provision for this work in our budgets. Imagine if we could build stronger institutions. Imagine what would happen if we all made that our priority: real inclusion to change the planet in the 11 years of the SDG agenda that we have left.

This is undoubtedly the time to stand up for humanity and human rights, to ensure that we implement global agreements and turn them into local realities. We must act today, not just for our generation but for the planet, for the world that we want to pass on to future generations. We received a world that is complex and full of contradictions. But here in this room, we have all the capacity, all the will and willingness that we need to set this planet on a better course.

The spirit of this Assembly is education. Education is a tool for change, a very powerful tool to achieve peace, security, the rule of law, the full respect of human rights and the rule of democracy everywhere. That has been the goal of the IPU throughout its 130-year life. And now, I invite you to look back with a sense of pride at the best moments in our history, but also to look ahead to a horizon where we are faced with greater and greater challenges.

That is where we stand in the IPU. It is certainly very complex at times. But we must be able to find solutions and turn them into reality. We are representatives: we represent our peoples and they count on our vocation and our heartfelt sincerity. We really must put people at the heart of what we do at all times.

At this Assembly, let us find new tools to work with in our parliaments. Let us do more on climate change, let us agree a deep and meaningful declaration on how education can help us to achieve more on peace, security, human rights and democracy. And we must also make significant progress on issues such as health and fighting terrorism.

So let us take advantage of this Assembly to build a better space for cooperation and dialogue. Let us build the foundations here and now for a more tolerant inclusive and respectful world. It is our responsibility to remember that we are here as representatives. We must remember our objectives, so that, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we will leave no one behind. As a Member of a Parliament and as the President of the IPU, I am very grateful for the trust you have placed in me. And in that regard, I call for us all to work together with dedication and strength, so that our voice can ring out most clearly and so that we can demonstrate the strength of our parliaments that our people are asking for. They are calling for change.

Thank you.