



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

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Your excellencies,
Madam Director,
Colleagues of the UN,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor to be joining you today on International Youth Day. I wish to thank and congratulate the Government of Uzbekistan for hosting this important event and for prioritizing youth and human rights. Thanks for inviting me.

I am a true believer – as is the Inter-Parliamentary Union – in the power of young men and women.

As many of you know, the IPU is the global organization of parliaments. We represent 179 national parliaments and over 90 per cent of the world population. I am proud to say that youth political participation is one of our strategic priorities.

We meet today at a defining moment in human history. It is a time that will be etched in the memories and schoolbooks of many generations that come after us. This meeting, in virtual format, is a testament to these extraordinary times.

The main reason for this is, of course, the global pandemic. COVID-19 has challenged human rights in many countries. It is understandable that in grave emergencies, urgent measures, like temporarily limiting the rights of assembly and movement, may be needed to protect people. However, especially in these times, it is critical that there be public oversight. This scrutiny is a hallmark of the work of parliament. And it is needed now, perhaps more than ever.

Thanks to the innovativeness of parliaments, the lockdowns in countries have usually not meant a shutdown of parliamentary work. In this regard, I would like to commend the Parliament of Uzbekistan for continuing to work during this pandemic, through videoconferencing and social distancing measures.

The pandemic has also revealed a need for greater international cooperation. I wish to acknowledge the work led by Uzbekistan in proposing an *International code of voluntary commitments of States during pandemics*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although COVID-19 is a critical issue rocking the international community right now, it is far from the only one. Well before this, we were dealing with other emergencies, such as the climate crisis and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. These are existential issues. How we respond to them will steer the trajectory of humanity.

It is the youth and children of today, and the future generations that follow, who will enjoy the fruits of our success or bear the consequences of our failures. Decisions are

being made about their futures. And for this simple reason, they have a right to be included as lead participants at the table.

Furthermore, at a time when the global community is trying to tackle incredible challenges, the world needs more innovation, more vigor, and more ideas. These are precisely the ingredients that youth specialize in. So, I would say that the political participation of youth is not only a right that must be fulfilled, but it is also the smartest investment we can make in our collective future.

Unfortunately, we have a long way to go. Despite more than half the world being under 30 years of age, only around 2 per cent of the world's MPs are under 30. In about 65 per cent of countries, young people old enough to vote are discriminated from running for political office.

I am proud that the IPU, and its Member Parliaments, have recognized these challenges and have committed to bold action. I speak to you on the 10th anniversary of the adoption of our landmark resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. This resolution triggered the IPU youth movement. Its message is simple: it calls on parliaments, governments and political parties to take legal and policy action to enhance youth participation. I wish to commend efforts being made to craft an international convention on the rights of youth. And I hope that the IPU resolution can be a useful blueprint to this end.

Inspired by the IPU resolution, the following are some of the concrete measures that can help make stronger youth participation a reality:

- First, legal barriers that close the door for young men and women to run for office must be removed. The IPU calls for countries to align the age to run for public office with the voting age.
- Second, special measures are needed to ensure that young people – young men and young women alike – are better represented politically. The most effective way to do this is through youth quotas that include gender parity objectives.
- Third, although we call for *more* young men and women in office, we also need those already there to carry more weight and influence in policymaking. The IPU promotes the election of young MPs to leadership positions as well as the introduction of youth mechanisms such as youth caucuses and committees in parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I alluded to at the outset, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that we are in one of the most important decades of human history. The future of our species and our planet is on the line. We need all hands on deck. We cannot afford to exclude anyone, especially youth. They – like everyone – have the right to be in the driver's seat of their own destinies. Global cooperation is needed to set a framework for this objective. And the IPU stands ready as an unwavering ally in these efforts.

Thank you.