



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Overall Activities Report of the Presidency, 2017–2020

Three years working together for a more inclusive and democratic IPU



Copyright © Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of IPU.

This publication is distributed on condition that it be neither lent nor otherwise distributed, including by commercial means, without the prior permission of the publishers, in any form other than the original and on condition that the next publisher meets the same requirements.

Applications for the right to reproduce or translate this work or parts thereof are welcomed and should be sent to IPU. Member Parliaments and their parliamentary institutions may reproduce or translate this work without permission, but are requested to inform IPU.

Cover photo: © IPU

Overall Activities Report of the Presidency, 2017–2020

**Three years working together for a more inclusive
and democratic IPU**



Gabriela Cuevas Barron during a press conference. © IPU

Dear fellow parliamentarians, dearest friends,

The past three years have been deeply exceptional. As I prepare to bid farewell to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), **I must emphasize that this document is not only an exercise in transparency and accountability, which, as you know, are principles in which I believe and strive to promote at every opportunity. It is also a reminder of the importance of parliamentarism in our world today.** That word has taken on particular significance in many aspects of my own life. This is partly because of my duties as President of this Organization, but also because I have become personally aware of how parliamentarians everywhere, every day, are tirelessly contributing to a better world.

I vowed to be a President that was actively and closely engaged with our Member Parliaments. That commitment took me across many countries to attend hundreds of events, and to listen to the voices and know the views of many stakeholders at the numerous meetings that took place during my term. **This is my way of returning the trust that you placed in me through my election that took place three years ago in St. Petersburg.** Certainly, this was not a simple task. However, it had to be done, because this is what is needed to make our Organization a vibrant one, in which inclusion and deliberation are central to its efforts in favour of democracy worldwide.

Many crises were already imminent before COVID-19 ravaged our world, with little regard to national borders. That is why the IPU must be at the forefront of global change: **the implementation of international agreements to transform them into national and local realities is indispensable to overcoming these challenges.** If the IPU remains an organization with relevance on the international stage, then so will parliamentarians.

Colleagues,

My duties as President of the IPU over the last three years have only strengthened my faith in parliaments as institutions that can transform the lives of their constituents for the better. **Specifically, this is also why global governance must have a parliamentary dimension at all times.** In doing so, initiatives conceived at the international level can then be brought to fruition in order to create tangible benefits for millions of people and overcome the common challenges that we face today.

I have strived to use this unique opportunity to contribute to creating an equal and sustainable planet. I still believe that, while current events pose an unprecedented challenge, **we have also been given a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build back better; to right what was wrong with our world; to fight for gender equality; to ensure young voices are heard; to build towards an international society in which peace, rather than conflict, becomes the norm.** As I thank you for this considerable honour, I invite you to join me in looking back upon the most significant moments of these last three years.



Gabriela Cuevas Barron
President of the IPU

The most important priorities

During my Presidency, **I strove in my endeavours to translate international commitments into national realities.** There is much to improve in terms of implementation processes that would allow us to carry the momentum of global agreements through to tangible realities at the local and regional level for the people that we represent. I believe the IPU has great potential in this regard, **and therefore, it is my wish to see it grow in relevance.** On a related note, this is also why the **IPU can be a key player in attaining sustainable development,** particularly as parliamentarians can reflect these priorities through their involvement in budget-related decisions. In keeping with this fact, **significant efforts were made to bring the IPU closer to the 2030 Agenda.**

I also vowed to make the IPU **a more inclusive organization,** so that more voices can be heard and considered in our decision-making processes, true to the parliamentary and deliberative spirit of this institution. In a similar vein, **fostering transparency in the IPU** was also a priority, which is befitting of the democratic principles that this Organization works for all over the world.

As the youngest and the second female President of the IPU in 131 years, **I am responsible for advocating for the inclusion of women and young people in parliament.** Only equal parliaments can build an equal world.

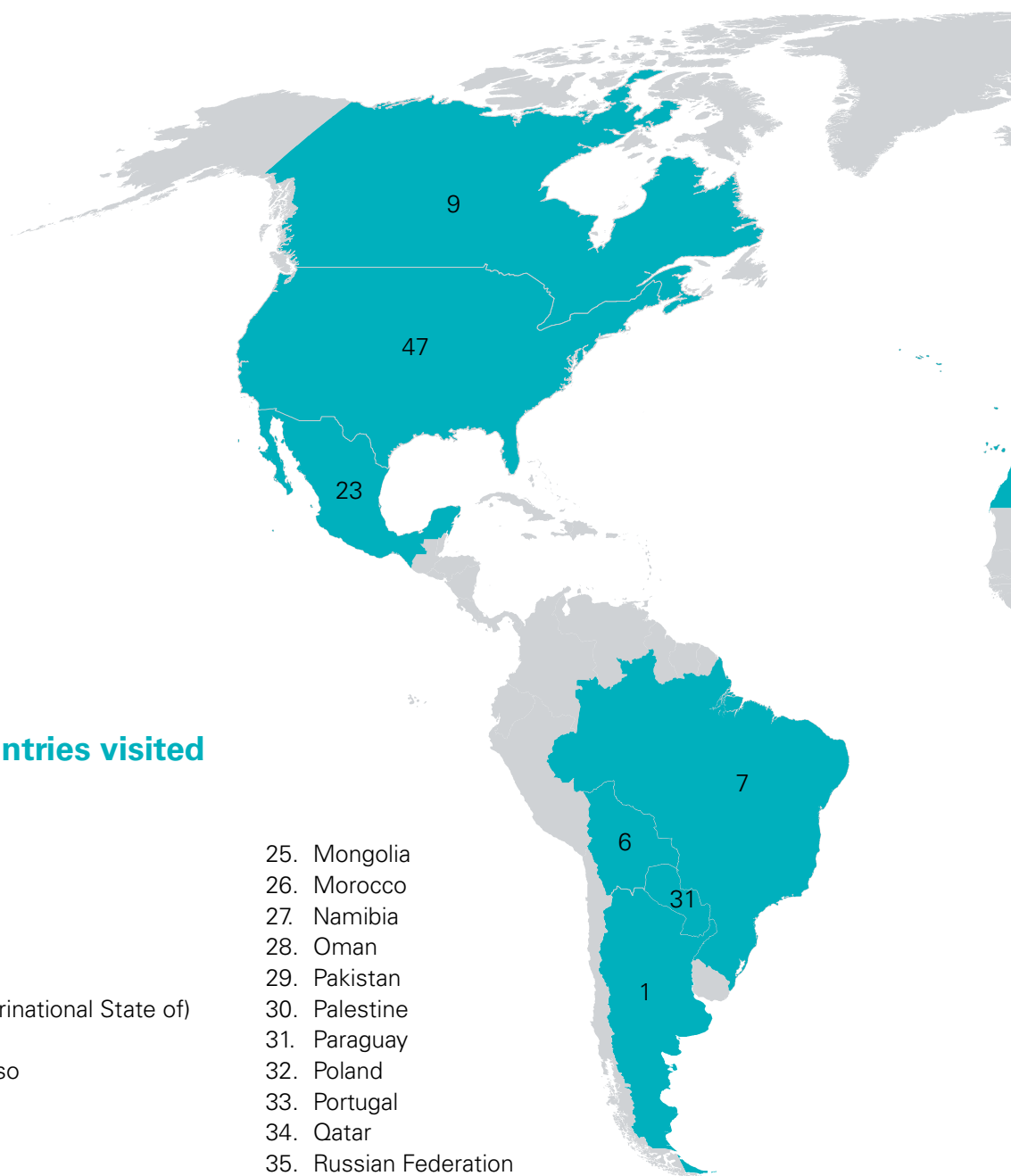
Furthermore, **the IPU agrees on documents of major relevance, including the United Nations General Assembly resolutions on the interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments, and the IPU, or the Declaration of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.** The IPU is political and parliamentary in nature: our documents – even working documents – must reflect that accordingly.

In terms of austerity, **we can also do much more while spending less.** Efficiency in the use of the budget – which is entrusted to the Organization by the Members – is indispensable. For this reason, I requested a modification of the relevant rules, so that the budget allocated to the Presidency can be used for more economical flights than those that were acquired before. **Ever since I managed to get these rules changed, savings have been reported in the small budget reserved for the Presidency, and more working tours have been covered.**

It must be underscored that we decided to innovate, so that the IPU can be up to the task of the challenges posed by the twenty-first century. This was done through the Speakers Dialogue; the Executive Education Parliamentary Leadership seminar; the IPU 130th Anniversary Book; the inclusion of more workshops during the IPU Assemblies; the advancement of new subjects in IPU-UN resolutions; the presence of the IPU in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); the democratization of the Preparatory Committee and the High-level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism; abiding by gender parity criteria when forming new working groups; making the Advisory Group on Health truly representative in geopolitical and gender-equality terms; and, very importantly, an agenda to increase transparency and accountability, and prevent conflicts of interest, where significant progress was made through reforming the IPU Statutes. It should be noted that the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the transparency report are still pending.

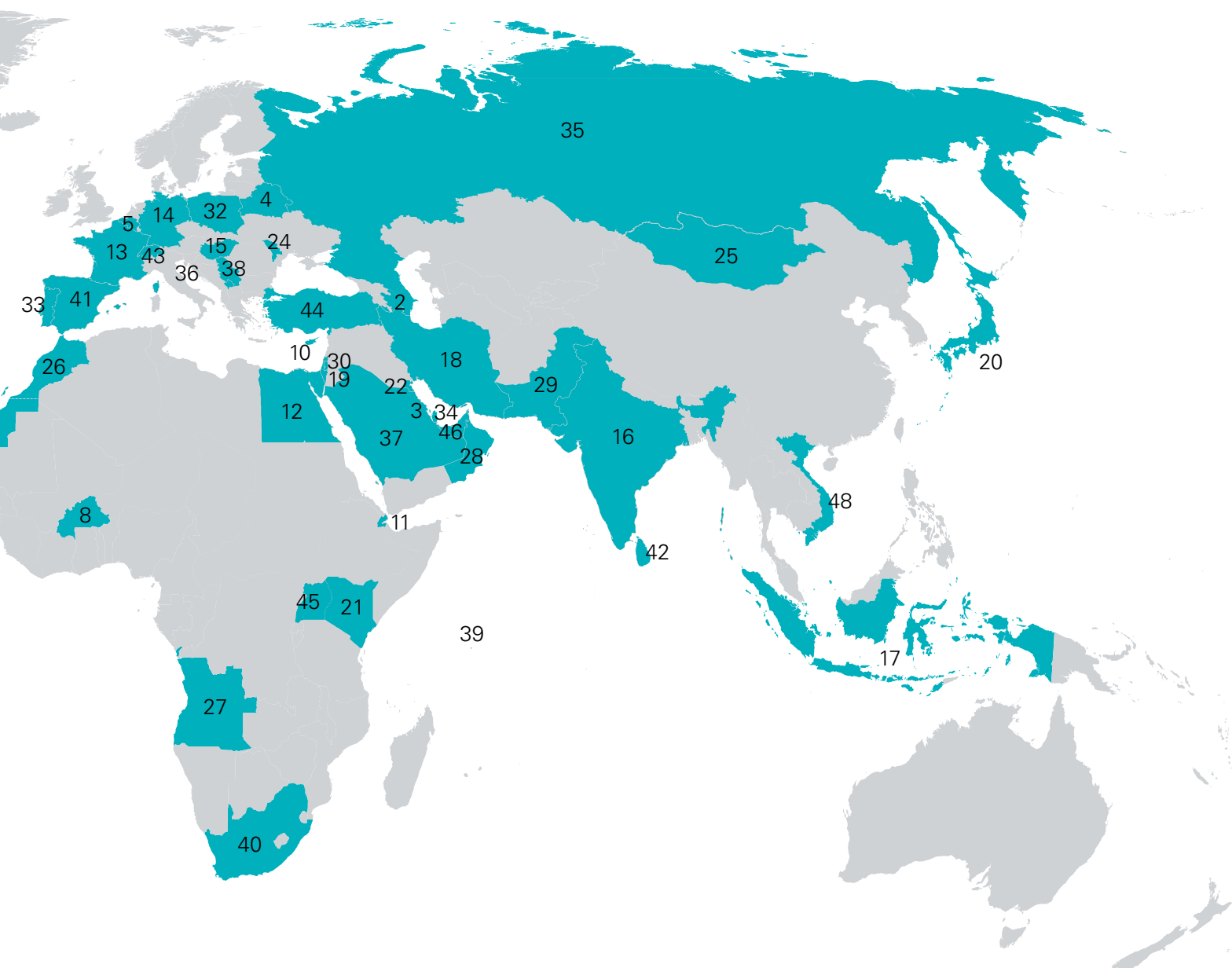
Additional responsibilities

During the Presidency, I was also part of other initiatives relevant to the IPU's agenda. These included the Champions Network for the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit; the UHC Movement Political Advisory Panel to UHC2030; the High-level Steering Group of *Every Woman, Every Child*; and the Ninth World Water Forum's Action Group to foster a water-sensitive approach to legislation and regulation.



List of countries visited 2017–2020

1. Argentina
2. Azerbaijan
3. Bahrain
4. Belarus
5. Belgium
6. Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
7. Brazil
8. Burkina Faso
9. Canada
10. Cyprus
11. Djibouti
12. Egypt
13. France
14. Germany
15. Hungary
16. India
17. Indonesia
18. Iran (Islamic Republic of)
19. Israel
20. Japan
21. Kenya
22. Kuwait
23. Mexico
24. Moldova
25. Mongolia
26. Morocco
27. Namibia
28. Oman
29. Pakistan
30. Palestine
31. Paraguay
32. Poland
33. Portugal
34. Qatar
35. Russian Federation
36. San Marino
37. Saudi Arabia
38. Serbia
39. Seychelles
40. South Africa
41. Spain
42. Sri Lanka
43. Switzerland
44. Turkey
45. Uganda
46. United Arab Emirates
47. United States of America
48. Viet Nam



The 2017–2020 IPU Presidency in numbers

- **29 working meetings** with heads of state and heads of government
- **Over 30 United Nations high-level meetings**, conferences, and events
- **48 countries visited**
- Over **20 Parliamentary Conferences**
- More than **90 bilateral meetings** with Speakers of Parliament
- Over **20 Meetings** of the Executive Committee **presided**

Starting the first year of the Presidency: October 2017 to March 2018



Election of the President of the IPU during the 137th IPU Assembly. © IPU

One of the main objectives was to push our commitments on climate change, women, youth empowerment, refugees and migration, as well as to promote multilateralism and parliamentary diplomacy as a way of improving the international context of our time. This was shown through my engagement at global and regional conferences such as COP23 in Bonn, the Fourth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Ottawa, the Preparatory Stock-taking Meeting for the Global Compact on Migration in Puerto Vallarta, the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Buenos Aires, the 26th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum in Viet Nam, and the Third Annual Conference of Speakers of Arab Parliaments in Cairo, among others.

I travelled to Geneva to attend and chair very important meetings and also went to New York three times. I tried to personally meet as many fellow parliamentarians and IPU associates as time allowed in order to establish closer and more efficient working relations.

My first official mission as IPU President was to the **Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the United Nations**

Climate Change Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany, on 12 November 2017. I stressed that climate change was a common concern for all humankind and a direct result of human activity that affected not only ecosystems but human rights too.



Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany. © IPU

I appealed to parliaments to take stronger and more concerted action to respond to climate change through effective implementation of the Paris Agreement. I also encouraged them to enhance international cooperation and partnerships so as to share information and experiences on a regional and global scale, with a view to ensuring ratification of the Paris Agreement. I asserted that, as legislators and overseers of government action, we have a great task to deliver. In this regard, I made reference to the **Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change**, adopted by the IPU Members. It seeks to ensure that the legislative response is appropriate and consistent with the goals set by the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**. The aforementioned Action Plan complements the outcome document of the Meeting, which is a call to action for the global parliamentary community.



Visit to IPU Headquarters in 2017. © IPU

I also praised actions already underway, **evidenced by a study on global trends in climate change legislation and litigation published by the IPU. It states that more than 1,200 climate change-related laws have been developed worldwide.** Finally, I asked my fellow parliamentarians to find ways to strengthen oversight of the implementation of national and international commitments to enhance transparency and



IPU Secretariat. © IPU

accountability, as well as to ensure consistency between climate legislation and other societal goals, such as poverty reduction, disaster risk reduction and gender equality.

During the conference, the parliamentarians participating were clear that the format of these conferences should be urgently modified into more useful and practical spaces for creating proposals to implement the Paris Agreement in their countries. A suggestion that was well received in light of this repeated request was to hold interactive workshops coordinated with the UNFCCC. Adding a practical component to our IPU Assemblies and inter-parliamentary activities would undoubtedly benefit our work at home, where we could undertake clear and concrete actions. We must make decisions and implement a new format for the COP24 meeting taking place next December in Poland.

On the heels of that meeting, **I travelled to IPU Headquarters in Geneva on 13 November with Mr. Duarte Pacheco, the Chair of the Twelve Plus Group, for my first official meeting with the IPU Secretary General, the senior management team and programme managers.** Over my two days there, I familiarized myself with the structure and work areas of the IPU, as well as with the people who work both in front and behind the scenes of the various dossiers.

Furthermore, during my stay in Geneva, Mr. Pacheco and I met with Ms. Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director of **the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)**, which had been awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. In our discussions with Ms. Fihn, we examined possible ways of mobilizing parliaments to promote the signature and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As a result of this meeting, we had a workshop to promote the ratification and implementation of the Treaty during the 138th IPU Assembly.

We also met with the **Assistant United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**, Mr. Volker Türk, with whom we analysed the need for the IPU to develop more active fieldwork in order to address legislative challenges in terms of nationality laws. At the meeting, I asked Mr. Türk for his support in ensuring that the High Commissioner would attend

the 138th IPU Assembly. We also agreed to conduct a workshop during the Assembly to analyse the **Zero Draft of the Global Compact on Refugees**. Both were already confirmed for the Assembly inauguration on 25 March. We also talked about the need to conduct more field missions. UNHCR proposed different places, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Zambia.

On 17 November, I travelled to Ottawa to address the **Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians**. This Conference, held under the theme *A place for all: Young parliamentarians as drivers of inclusion*, was intended to design strategies to promote the inclusion of young people and reduce the social, economic, and political generational gap. Discussions centred on three main themes: the political participation of young people; migration and social integration; and inclusive growth. The Conference was the biggest rallying event for young men and women MPs from around the world.



Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. © IPU

Through the exchange of experiences and good practices of different parliaments, the aim was to unite young politicians around a vision for a future that leaves no one behind. Canada could not have been a more apt host, as it represents hope for so many people – young and old – of different origins and backgrounds.



Opening session of the Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, Ottawa. © IPU Flickr

I had the opportunity to address my fellow young parliamentarians. I shared my knowledge as a young politician whose career started at the age of 15. I conveyed my understanding for the difficult circumstances that young people face nowadays, and highlighted the important and great responsibility that we have as parliamentarians to adequately represent the young citizens of our countries. The IPU is constantly working to raise the voice of the youth and ensure that their interests and concerns are heard and articulated. To avoid this democratic deficit, we need to change the way of doing politics, representing citizens and creating open and inclusive policies.

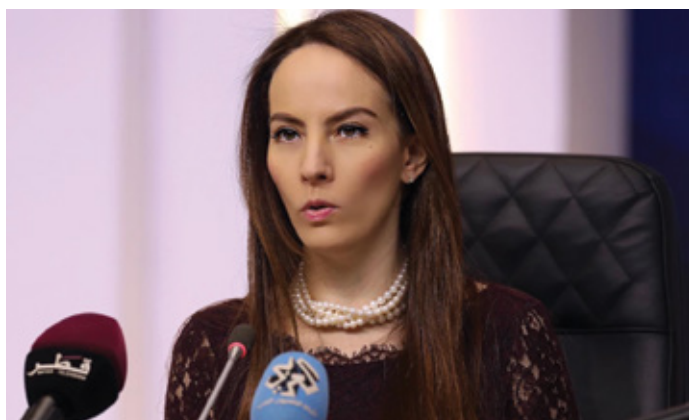
To encourage young people into the political arena, politics itself needs to undergo profound transformation. **It needs innovation,**

transparency and better communications. The reality is that the world is changing rapidly, and we need to change with it. I appealed to parliamentarians to reflect on our responsibility to create opportunities for young populations to fulfil their potential to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I asserted that, to do this, we must guarantee their access to decision-making processes, in parallel with adjusting our national policies to the fast-paced changes of the twenty-first century.

Another priority in our parliamentary agenda is migration. This is a concern very close to my heart, which is why I was particularly delighted to address, on 4 December, the **Preparatory Stock-taking Meeting on the Global Compact on Migration** in Puerto Vallarta in my native Mexico. The IPU delegation of parliamentarians included representatives from Africa, Europe and Latin America.

Honourable Margaret Mensah Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, and Mr. José Ignacio Echaniz, President of Spain's Delegation to the IPU and a member of the Chamber of Deputies of Spain, contributed by highlighting the role parliamentarians must play to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration at the national, regional and global levels.

Also, I took the opportunity to have a meeting with the **Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ambassador William Lacy Swing**. I extended to him





Preparatory Stock-Taking Meeting on the Global Compact on Migration. © IPU

an invitation to address our Assembly the following March. He accepted immediately, and expressed his satisfaction over future cooperation between the IPU and IOM with regard to the Global Compact on Migration.

During my contribution to the Retrospection Session at the Stock-taking Meeting, I acknowledged different realities and experiences across the globe. They are one of the reasons why we often find it difficult to achieve consensus on the migration policy agenda. However, I encouraged participants to look beyond our differences and find common denominators from which to build diverse and feasible resolutions that can ultimately lead to national policies in line with international objectives. In particular, as parliamentarians, and as the closest representatives to our people, we know first-hand how societies are evolving as a result of migration flows. Therefore, we are charged with the task of ensuring that international standards are respected at home for the benefit of the people. A clear example are migrant children, a topic we have been working on to design protection schemes for children and adolescents migrating alone.

On a side note, **the IPU has been addressing migration in recent years in a number of ways.** One very successful example was the adopted resolution, *The role of parliamentarians in protecting the rights of children, in particular unaccompanied migrant children, and in preventing their exploitation in situations of war and conflict.* The General Debate during the 133rd Assembly in October 2015 was entitled *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration.* In mid-November 2017, the IPU co-organized with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean an international conference in Valetta, Malta, on promoting better regional cooperation on migration in the Mediterranean. The IPU was represented at that event by Mr. Jorge Laço, Vice-President of the Portuguese Parliament and Vice-President of the IPU Portuguese delegation. Mr. Laço knows firsthand about the perils of crossing the sea in search of a better life, and the sacrifices that millions of men, women and children are forced to make.

Beyond those cold facts and statistics lie real human stories of poverty, marginalization, violence and persecution. Representing the IPU, Mr. Laço urged parliamentarians to change their

discourse from economic pragmatism to realism, and to shape public opinion away from a perspective of national threat towards one with humanitarian implications. In February 2018, the subject was further discussed at the Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, and was taken up again at the 138th Assembly.

I travelled to New York in November 2017. I met with **Mr. Jan Eliasson, former United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, and Mr. Alan Stoga, founder of the Tällberg Foundation,** to discuss how the IPU could adopt an approach that favours leadership programmes for young parliamentarians.

A personal **meeting was held with United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed,** as a way of introducing myself. Our discussions delved into the IPU's willingness to work in a coordinated manner with the United Nations, particularly on the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),** and the agenda of empowerment for women and youth, which is of tremendous importance for our parliaments, as well as our countries.



UN Deputy Secretary General, Amina Mohammed. © IPU

The **Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization on the occasion of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, took place on 9–10 December 2017.** The event was organized with the National Congress of Argentina. The Parliamentary Conference provided the ideal forum for MPs to have meaningful exchanges with government negotiators to enhance trade policies in the interests of the people.

During my intervention, I pointed to **the paradox between the enormous international flows of tradable goods and services, and the barriers and protectionist measures being set up to curb those flows.** Such trends go against the spirit of globalization, and undermine prosperity and development for some countries. I therefore stressed that parliamentarians have a responsibility to respond to the needs of their people, starting

by promoting a clear understanding of the advantages of free trade, and dispelling the notion that free trade is in any way linked to unemployment globally.



Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization on the occasion of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference © IPU Flickr

I urged MPs to look for ways to achieve greater effectiveness in the debates and action carried out at the WTO, and to generate discussions that lead us to much more just and equitable global trade. I also encouraged parliamentarians to achieve greater transparency and closeness to all the procedures and dialogues that take place between governments, parliaments and civil society in commercial matters. We must reflect on how we can build greater capacities among parliamentarians, particularly in technical matters, regarding the commercial and financial agenda, so as **to be able to conduct informed discussions and decisions related to the WTO from a parliamentary perspective.**

Moreover, on this occasion, **I met with the Minister of Foreign Relations of Argentina, Mr. Jorge Faurie**, to formalize his country's commitment to host the 140th IPU Assembly in the city of Buenos Aires. He also delivered a letter of commitment, stating that all IPU Members could participate in the Assembly, consistent with the fundamental values of unity and inclusion in our Organization.

I was invited by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to participate in the High Commissioner's event, *Dialogue on protection challenges: Towards a global compact on refugees*, which took me to Geneva on 12–13 December. I co-chaired a thematic session on reception and admission with Mr. Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner, and later delivered the conclusions of the meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi.

In my intervention, I stressed that **the people, their human rights and their dignity, must always be at the centre of our discussions, actions and decisions as legislators.** In particular, when it comes to migrants, refugees, asylum seekers or displaced people, they often become invisible, and their rights are rendered vulnerable. Therefore, as lawmakers, policymakers and representatives of the people in our countries, we have a fundamental role in the shaping and implementation of international agreements, particularly the Global Compacts on Refugees and

on Migrants. As I have stressed before, we must actively engage in our duty to translate these international commitments into national agendas and policies. **No one should be left behind.**

During my trip to Geneva, **I also met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein**, to whom I reaffirmed our commitment to protect and defend the human rights of parliamentarians, a responsibility we treasure at the IPU. I also extended an invitation to him to participate in our next Assembly in March. I requested his support to carry out workshops that could provide in-depth information and tools to allow parliamentarians to improve policy frameworks on human rights in every country.



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. © IPU

Furthermore, **Mr. Konstantin Kosachev, Vice-President of the Executive Committee**, and I held a meeting with the **Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Michael Møller**. We discussed existing cooperation, and explored further avenues for the future, particularly regarding the SDGs. We proposed organizing a workshop for the Chairs of foreign affairs and finance committees of all IPU Member Parliaments, so as to offer practical information for better implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In each meeting, I took the opportunity to invite each of them to deliver keynote addresses at our upcoming Assembly. They all gladly accepted.

Together with the First Vice-President of the Executive Committee, Mr. K. Kosachev, I attended a working lunch with the **Secretary General, his Senior Adviser and Chief of Staff on 13 December 2017**. We discussed a number of issues, including convening a possible enlarged extraordinary session of the Executive Committee in early 2018, to which the presidents of the various geopolitical groups would be invited for their input.

The session would serve as an induction for new members and an introduction to the President and her vision. It would benefit from the input and relay of information from the geopolitical groups.

My first mission in 2018 took me to Hanoi, Viet Nam, for the **26th session of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum**. The theme of the event, ***Parliamentary partnership: Peace, innovation, and sustainable development***, struck a chord. I underscored the close relationship between the IPU and the National Assembly, which had culminated in the landmark **Hanoi Declaration at the 132nd IPU Assembly in March 2015, entitled *The SDGs: Turning words into actions***. During my speech at the inauguration, I stated that if we, as parliamentarians, wish to make a change, then we must begin by changing our communities. In this endeavour, partnership was key. Therefore, **I urged them to join their efforts towards achieving lasting peace and sustainable development for the benefit and well-being of the people**. Additionally, I highlighted the current importance of the Asia-Pacific region, as it holds 60 per cent of global GDP, possesses a remarkable potential for innovation and technology, and has a great capacity to address challenges, such as climate change, sustainable development, migration, displacement, refugees, inequalities and terrorism.

During my stay in Hanoi, together with Mr. Kosachev, we held a meeting with the Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong, to look over pending issues facing the Organization. It is important that the Secretariat supports the Presidency to guarantee a more productive agenda during international events. In this sense, working closely and keeping communications channels open will improve our coordination concerning events and meetings.

I held a meeting with **Mr. Tran Dai Quang, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam**. In this context, I highlighted that Viet Nam is an example among the “leading nations in terms of economic growth, inclusive development and a strong voice on the issue of free trade”.

Additionally, I pointed out that regional cooperation is essential to address the priorities of the international community, and that participation in the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum provides an opportunity to give renewed impetus to the collaboration between the Forum and the IPU.

I also had a meeting with **Mrs. Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, President of the National Assembly of Viet Nam**. We both agreed on the need to work together because, to succeed in the implementation of the SDGs, it was essential to align particular interests and strategies on how to proceed. In addition, I met with the **General Secretary of the Communist Party, Mr. Nguyen Phu Trong**.

The 277th (extraordinary) session of the Executive Committee took place at IPU Headquarters on 3 and 4 February 2018. The Chairs of the geopolitical groups were also invited. It was practically the first time the IPU had held a meeting of this nature. It was very intense and productive. Over two days of fruitful discussions, I got to know the new and longstanding members more closely, and presented to them my vision for the Organization. In particular, **I shared with them my deep commitment**

to building a Presidency close to parliamentarians and the geopolitical groups, so as to consolidate the IPU as the most relevant inter-parliamentary organization with an active role in the global agenda. I mainly conveyed my intention to make the IPU a more transparent, efficient, inclusive and communicative organization, which is at the service of its Member Parliaments, and whose work translates into benefits for the people in our communities.

At that meeting I presented the IPU President’s vision for the Organization, entitled ***Let’s change the world, it starts from our community***. I had the opportunity to elaborate on four main topics: **1) the IPU Community, our Organization; 2) our most important community: our colleagues, the parliamentarians; 3) our immediate communities: our parliaments, our countries, and 4) the IPU and the global community.**

I also had the opportunity to briefly present the amendments to the IPU Statutes and Rules that I submitted last December. The aim of these amendments was to provide transparency and certainty to several actions that are carried out in the Organization but that lack an adequate regulatory framework. Basically, they cover five issues that I believe must be subjected to a thorough evaluation to bring the IPU firmly into the 21st century. Those issues are: **a) matters related to the legal commitments of the IPU and their approval procedure; b) responsibilities and prerogatives of the Presidency; c) communication, transparency and accountability; d) the Triennial Strategy and e) official languages.**

Moreover, **we had a presentation from an external perspective by three outside consultants.** On the one hand, the views of Mr. Alan Stoga, Chairman of the Board of the Tällberg Foundation; and on the other, Mr. Patrick Noack and Maddalena Campioni of The Global Future. This was a novelty at that meeting, and provided a welcome breath of fresh air.

On the heels of that Executive Committee meeting, **I opened the first meeting of the newly established High-level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.** In my opening remarks, I emphasized the sensitive nature of terrorism, to which no country was immune. I applauded the initiative, which sought to create synergies between the United Nations and the IPU, and encouraged the Group to be as inclusive and open as possible. The Group elected its Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson (both of whom are women) and agreed on its Terms of Reference. As part of its future work, it decided to examine the root causes of terrorism and its regional specificities, as well as to develop a database of counter-terrorism laws to share good practices.

In the same vein, I travelled to Cairo to attend **the Third Annual Conference of Speakers of Arab Parliaments in February**. One of the main issues on the agenda was terrorism. **I stated terrorism had no religion and no language, other than hate;** it had no borders or nationalities, and threatened freedom and life itself. I condemned the association made between terrorism and Islam, which was a religion of peace. As a global threat, terrorism must be tackled by the global community in a coordi-

nated manner. I informed the Arab Speakers about the High-level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which had held its first meeting shortly beforehand. Additionally, I emphasized the responsibility of parliaments to ensure that solid laws were in place and enforced to deal with terrorism, money laundering, human trafficking and other related crimes.

During my visit, I held several meetings with different delegations to learn and better understand their priorities and concerns in the region. I met with **H.E. Meshal bin Fahmi Al-Salami, Speaker of the Arab Parliament**, and with **H.E. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League**.



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2018. © IPU Flickr

I presided over the annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations along with the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák. The theme of the event, *Towards a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration: A parliamentary perspective*, was particularly relevant, as the Global Compact on Migration was launched in 2018. On this occasion, I shared my perspective regarding parliamentary action. As a common element of human history, international migration remains a distinctive feature of contemporary society. Today, people facing harsh circumstances, such as poverty, disaster risks, violence and conflict, are forced to look for any chance to find better living conditions. This often entails taking dangerous journeys, compounded by stigmatization and discrimination upon reaching their destination. Sadly, the vicious circle of vulnerability and human rights violations does not end here, as I have previously mentioned.

It is clear that no State can deal with the phenomenon of migration and human displacement on its own, which is why I welcomed the Zero Draft of the Global Compact on Migration, issued recently by the two co-Facilitators, Ambassador Juan José Gómez Camacho from Mexico, and Ambassador Jürg Lauber from Switzerland. I confirmed the IPU's support for the initiative, and for keeping this matter high on both our agenda and the agenda of parliaments. Citing the outcome document of the General Debate at the 133rd Assembly, I reiterated that "migrants are not numbers, but human beings. As rightsbearers, they are to be treated with dignity and with respect for their human rights, regardless of their motive for leaving their homes or their status as regular or irregular migrants."

During that visit to the United Nations, we met with the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, discussed the status of IPU-UN



UN General Assembly debate on the Resolution on the Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union at UN Headquarters. © IPU

cooperation, and explored avenues for further engagement. I underscored the critical role and responsibility of parliaments in achieving the SDGs, particularly concerning the processes of ratification, adjustment of national legislation, budget or finance allocation, and accountability to make the SDGs feasible at a local level in a way that ultimately resonates at the global level. I emphasized that MPs could bring a legislative perspective to major United Nations processes. **I also took the opportunity to invite Secretary-General Guterres to our 139th Assembly.**

As the biennial resolution, *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union* was a priority on the agenda, we met with Mexican Ambassador Juan José Gómez Camacho to work on the draft, together with the IPU Secretariat. At that meeting, we agreed to deliver a less inertial and bureaucratic resolution, and a more modern and effective one that truly reflects our mandate and commitment as MPs, so as to promote democracy and human rights worldwide; namely, the role the IPU plays in defending the human rights of parliamentarians, and its tireless work devoted to achieving gender equality and greater opportunities for young people. By doing so, I explained, we were aiming to have a simpler, more practical and modern document for parliamentarians that could allow for closer cooperation, implementation and monitoring. We finally agreed that the Mexican Mission to the United Nations would submit a proposal to IPU Members for their analysis, deliberation and decision prior to the beginning of the process with other embassies.

In the context of the Hearing, the IPU Presidency and the Secretariat invited the delegations to a cocktail. The event was attended by Mr. Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General; Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the United Nations General



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2018. © IPU

Assembly; Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy United Nations SecretaryGeneral; Mr. Juan José Gómez Camacho, Mexican Ambassador to the United Nations; Mr. Jürg Lauber, Swiss Ambassador to the United Nations; and other prominent people from the United Nations system and diplomatic affairs. I had the opportunity to give a speech where I stressed the importance of cooperation among institutions and how parliamentarians should promote the protection of migrants, eradicate discrimination, and develop better conditions for them.

During my stay in New York, I also had the opportunity **to meet with more than 20 delegations that attended the Hearing**, which I hope can become a daily practice of the IPU Presidency.

I am truly committed to having a closer relationship with my fellow parliamentarians, with a view to better understanding the concerns and proposals of all Members, and taking substantial and concrete actions towards the improvement of not only our Organization, but also the current state of international relations and the SDGs.

In March, I was back in New York for the **Parliamentary Meeting at the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women**. We held our Meeting under the theme, **Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls**. I participated in different IPU-sponsored side events: **Violence against women in politics** and **Gender quotas and youth quotas**. I also met with



President of the 73th Session of the General Assembly. Mr. Miroslav Lajcak and United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres. © IPU



Parliamentary Meeting at the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. © IPU

Ms. Ana Maria Menendez, senior adviser on policy to the Secretary-General. In my press conference, I highlighted the stagnation of women's participation and the means to redress this situation, and referred to **the IPU report, *Women in parliament in 2017: The year in perspective***.

I participated in **the inauguration of the World Water Forum in Brasilia**, where I also had a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Aloysio Nunes, and attended a lunch hosted by Brazilian President, Mr. Michel Temer. In the context of the World Water Forum, I took part in **a parliamentary event on 18 March organized by the Brazilian Congress, the Organization of American States, and the United Nations Environment Programme**.



IPU 138th Assembly. © IPU Flickr

Continuing with the momentum of the first year: March 2018 to October 2018

As part of **the 138th IPU Assembly** held in March in Geneva, I had meetings with the IPU geopolitical groups, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. This continues to fulfil my commitment to being a close and accessible President to all our Members.



138th IPU Assembly. © IPU Flickr

In addition, **I engaged in other bilateral meetings with the delegations of several countries, seeking to enhance cooperation efforts between their respective parliaments and the IPU**. Namely, I met with representatives from China and Mongolia, and with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Viet Nam, Ms. Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan. I met with the Speaker of the South African National Assembly, Ms. Baleka Mbete; the Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka, Mr. Karunaratne Jayarajasinghe; the Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro, Mr. Ivan Brajovic; and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, Ms. Tsveta Valcheva Karayancheva. Furthermore, I attended an even larger number of meetings with: Mr. Mishal F. al-Sulami, Speaker of the Arab Parliament; Mr. Habib el-Malki, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Morocco; Mr. Jigme Zangpo,

Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan; the delegation of Israel; the delegation of Thailand; the Speaker of the Senate of Algeria, Mr. Abdelkader Bensalah; the delegation of Eritrea; and the President of the Consultative Council of Qatar, Mr. Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud. Lastly, I met with Ms. Na-Kyungwon from the Republic of Korea delegation; Mr. Roger Nkodo-Dang, President of the Pan-African Parliament; Mr. Marzouq Ali al-Ghanim, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait; the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Mr. Sam Rainsy from the Cambodian delegation; the delegation of Yemen; and the Foreign Affairs Committees of France, Turkey, India and Ecuador.

In April, I travelled to Washington DC **to the Global Parliamentary Conference of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund**. We focused on covering crucial topics, such as international financing for development, economic stability, and the achievement of the SDGs. This meeting was attended by over 150 parliamentarians from across 100 countries and featured high-level authorities from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. During my intervention in this event, I stressed the challenges that the world is facing in terms of unemployment and representation of young people, who are often most vulnerable to the complications of unemployment.

I addressed **the 12th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in April in Cochabamba, (Plurinational State of Bolivia)**, held under the theme ***Women Speakers: Working so every voice counts***. The Summit provided an opportunity to assess progress in women's leadership in parliaments, which stood at 51 women Speakers in 48 countries.



138th IPU Assembly. © IPU Flickr



UN General Assembly debate on the Resolution on the Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union at UN Headquarters. © IPU

While I lamented that the road to gender equality remained long and tedious, I took hope from the fact that the seeds of change were present. **Women Speakers were no longer a small elite, but were reaching a critical mass that could positively influence global governance**, much as they had changed the political landscape in their own countries.

I appealed to the Women Speakers present to use their collective talents, unique experiences and common will to accelerate change and transform parliaments so they could better deliver for all people. Their leadership would help make parliaments models for inclusiveness in society. I reminded them of the three conditions necessary for change: **addressing women's underrepresentation; achieving inclusive societies and parliaments; and combating violence against women in politics.**

Latin America in general, and Bolivia in particular, were shining examples of notable progress in building more inclusive parliaments, having recognized the right to fair and equal representation of ethnic minorities and disabled persons. They had also taken concrete action to address violence against women in all spheres – in the home, at the workplace and in politics. I applauded these positive initiatives, and encouraged other parliaments in the region and beyond to follow suit.

In May, I participated in **the United Nations General Assembly debate on the resolution, *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the InterParliamentary Union*, at UN Headquarters in New York.** Following the debate, the Resolution was adopted with **91 co-sponsors**. H.E. Gómez Camacho, Ambassador of Mexico in New York, spearheaded the process of garnering support for that important resolution, which is adopted every two years. As part of the preparatory process,



Opening session of the 12th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament. © IPU Flickr

several meetings were arranged between H.E. Gómez Camacho, the IPU Secretariat and the IPU Presidency. **I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank all the countries who sponsored this initiative**, and particularly all colleagues who travelled to United Nations Headquarters on that very important occasion for parliamentarians across the world. **I would also like to express my gratitude and to commend the efforts of H.E. Gómez Camacho in the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations.**

This Resolution, in addition to being clearer and more concise compared to what was achieved in previous efforts, contains three important aspects that must be highlighted: **1) it proclaims 30 June as the International Day of Parliamentarism, starting in 2018;** 2) it opens the possibility for parliamentarians to attend important coordination meetings at the United Nations Secretariat and; 3) it paves the way to new areas of cooperation, such as sustaining peace, interfaith and interethnic dialogue, countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. This was a major achievement for the IPU and for parliaments around the world.

This progress also resulted in an increase in representation and inclusiveness, as it allowed parliamentarians to attend important meetings, as opposed to the previous situation, in which only the Secretariat participated.

In addition, key multilateral achievements that year were **the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees**. These were two processes in which I was closely involved both personally and institutionally, by working directly with the co-facilitators who drafted the document and with UNHCR respectively. I also attended work meetings with stakeholders, presided over events with UNHCR, and was a panellist on various occasions. I praised the efforts made and negotiations conducted as part of both Global Compacts. The IPU followed developments closely and increasingly aligned the topics on its agenda with that of the United Nations.

Furthermore, with support from the IPU Secretariat, **we drafted proposals to include a parliamentary role within the Global Compacts**, as our role in terms of implementation, budgeting and overall responsibilities will prove to be crucial. **I am also pleased to report that – after constant meetings and follow-up with H.E. Gómez Camacho and H.E. Volker Turk throughout the entire process – both Global Compacts mention the importance of parliamentary duties and responsibilities.**

I travelled to Belgrade, Serbia, on 24 May to deliver the opening address at the **Regional Seminar on the SDGs for the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia**. That was the fourth edition of the SDGs seminar in that region, with MPs having previously gathered twice in Romania and once in



Regional Seminar on the SDGs for the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. © IPU

Hungary. Those events had focused on climate change, the environment, health, poverty, inclusion and participation.

In response to the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs, **which were mainstreamed throughout the IPU strategy for 2017–2021, the IPU produced a selfassessment toolkit to help parliaments get fit for purpose.** Self-assessment exercises have been successfully conducted in Fiji, Djibouti, Georgia, Kenya, Mali and Namibia. Such events provide platforms for sharing experiences and knowledge at the parliamentary level. **While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, best practices could certainly go a long way towards encouraging and inspiring other parliaments to play an active role in implementing the SDGs.**

During that event, I held meetings with the **Speakers of the Parliaments of North Macedonia and Croatia.** I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Duarte Pacheco, Chair of the Twelve Plus Group, who attended the event.

I convened **the 279th (extraordinary) session of the Executive Committee on 17 and 18 June 2018 at IPU Headquarters in Geneva.** That session was devoted almost exclusively to the discussion of proposed amendments to the IPU's Statutes and Rules. The VicePresident of the Executive Committee, Mr. Kosachev, had led consultations within the Executive Committee and geopolitical groups with a view to reaching consensus on a number of matters.



South Asian Speakers' Summit on the SDGs. © IPU

On 11 July, I participated in the third edition of the South Asian Speakers' Summit on the SDGs held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. During the opening session, we had the honour of being joined by Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. The event built on the achievements of the previous two summits, held in Bangladesh in 2016 and India in 2017. I underscored how proud the IPU was to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences among parliamentarians through that platform.



279th (extraordinary) session of the Executive Committee. © IPU

Throughout this year, we started and continued efforts to improve and clarify the contents of our own legal framework, the IPU Statutes. I seize this opportunity to thank all parliaments and parliamentarians who got involved in this process to build consensus. **I express my gratitude in particular to Mr. Kosachev, who dedicated his constant efforts and a great deal of time to find the best route to proceed in this sense.** My deepest gratitude also goes to the members of the Executive Committee, who dedicated several days both to travel, and to discussing this topic.

Regarding this point, it is also my duty to be transparent and sincere: **it is very unlikely that we will reach the necessary consensus to give more certainty and clarity to the functions of all the parts that comprise our institution.** While it is true that politics refers to the art of dialogue and the construction of agreements and compromises, it is also a reality that transforming an institution has proven to be a considerably difficult task.

The summit provided a valuable opportunity to advance discussions on the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all, as stated in Goal 8. It also enabled the participants to reflect on the most appropriate strategies to eradicate forced labour, and to promote social protection and safe and secure working environments.

Yet despite best efforts and initiatives, **national ownership remained a challenge. The SDGs were still very much viewed as global goals for many, and had not trickled down to the grassroots level.** The responsibility would be on parliaments to sensitize their constituents, especially those in rural areas, to the SDGs through more consultations, and to show them how achieving the Goals could improve their lives in different ways.

In parallel to this event, I held bilateral meetings with the following representatives: **Mr. Abdul Raouf Ibrahimi, Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga of Afghanistan; Mr. Tashi Dorji, Speaker**

of the National Council of Bhutan; Ms. Sumitra Mahajan, Speaker of the Lok Sabha; and Mr. Karu Jarasuriya, Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

As part of my commitment to ensure that representation of the IPU at the United Nations is always visible and never absent, I addressed **the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 16 July**. It is important to note that this is part of my Presidency's vision to increase the IPU's presence during important United Nations events. While I always sought to visit UN Headquarters with a delegation of the IPU, it is still necessary to find ways of handing over more access passes to more parliamentarians from our Organization.

I stressed that, while all 17 Goals were important, the IPU placed strong emphasis on Goal 16, sometimes called the governance goal. **Building transparent, inclusive, and accountable institutions, starting with national parliaments, required painstaking efforts. That was exactly what the IPU did: help parliaments become more representative by strengthening their law-making and oversight functions.** Yet despite gains, democracy-building remained an uphill battle almost everywhere. For the SDGs to succeed, the international community should invest much more in governance than ever before, including in conflict prevention.

Under the main theme of sustainability and resilience, I underscored the illogical disconnect between the economy and the environment in absolute terms. After numerous discussions on the topic over the years at IPU events, **the main finding to emerge was that, in addition to efficiency, we must focus on sufficiency. A new economic model must be developed that was less dependent on consumption and more conducive to human happiness.** Action was particularly important in developed countries, whose carbon footprint was well above average.

I appealed to the national delegations to the High-level Political Forum to include one or two MPs in their delegations so as to strengthen collaboration between the executive and legislative branches of the State. Parliaments were crucial to implementation and national ownership of the SDGs.

In addition to this, I participated in the **workshop devised for parliamentarians to get acquainted with the self-assessment toolkit on SDG strategies and implementation.** The workshop was held at Uganda House in New York.

As the Secretary General was present in New York for that event, I seized the opportunity to discuss a number of issues with him. We agreed to streamline the agendas of the Executive Committee and the Governing Council, and underscored the need for strict time management of the sessions of the governing bodies. We also identified a number of high-level personalities to be invited to the 139th Assembly, which would be held under the general theme of innovation. We discussed the SDGs financing workshop for the Chairs of the budget and finance committees, which was an activity I had put forward under my vision for the IPU. During this meeting, we also covered a lot of issues, such

as the High-level Steering Group on *Every Woman Every Child*; the International Day of Democracy; the 140th IPU Assembly in Buenos Aires; the regional workshop for nonmember parliaments of the Caribbean; the Parliamentary Meeting at the Intergovernmental Conference to adopt the Global Compact on Migration in Morocco; the World Investment Forum; the Geneva Peace Week panellists; the Annual Parliamentary Hearing in 2019; the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament; the P20 meeting in Buenos Aires; the Fifth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians; the proposed mission to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the planned mission to the Middle East; and the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.

I attended a meeting with **Mr. Pete Ricketts, Governor of the state of Nebraska**, in which we discussed the relationship between the United States and the IPU. Due to the fact that Mr. Ricketts will be presiding over a Governors' Conference in 2019, I sought this opportunity to open the door for further discussions **on promoting our efforts for the reaffiliation of the US Congress to our Organization.**

In September, **I held a meeting with legislators from the Venezuelan National Assembly**, during which we discussed the recent denouncement of human rights violations against parliamentarians, and the possibility of sending an IPU fact-finding mission to Venezuela. It is important to mention that we are constantly working – despite the difficulty of the task – to send a mission that would listen to all parties involved, to find a humanitarian solution to the crisis.

I attended the **Second Eurasian Women's Forum in St. Petersburg**, Russian Federation, in which I delivered a speech at the plenary session entitled ***Women for Global Security and Sustainable Development***. In addition to this, I participated in the panel on women for balanced economic growth, and the W20 meeting. I also held meetings with **Ms. Matviyenko, Chair-**



Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women. © IPU

person of the Council of the Federation; Ms. Samoura from FIFA; Dr. Al-Qubaisi from the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates; and Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women.



Second Eurasian Women's Forum. © IPU

During the United Nations High-level Week, I travelled to New York City to participate in several meetings. I co-chaired the **Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Accountability Breakfast**. This event was led by **Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Chair of the PMNCH**. It focused on efforts to strengthen results, resources and rights, including through the partnership of all stakeholder groups – governments, parliamentarians, media, NGOs, youth groups, the private sector, the United Nations, donors, academia and others. After the main event, I attended a high-level meeting with Ms. Bachelet.



Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Accountability Breakfast. © IPU

I attended the session ***Emerging challenges and shifting paradigms: New perspectives on international cooperation for development***; the **High-level Meeting on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**; and the **Nelson Mandela Peace Summit**, where I delivered a speech remembering Mr. Mandela's legacy. Later in the evening, I attended the **2018 Concordia Annual Summit**, a high-level forum aimed at catalysing action through shared-value approaches and social-

impact objectives. Participants included Mr. Iván Duque Márquez, President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Michel Temer, President of Brazil, and many other eminent speakers.



United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres. © IPU

I also **attended the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly General Debate**. Afterwards, I was invited to the **State Luncheon held by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres**. In the afternoon, I attended a second session of the 2018 Concordia Annual Summit.

I was invited to an event to celebrate the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** attended by the United Nations Secretary-General. Afterwards I had a meeting with the Azerbaijani authorities to discuss the upcoming forum in the city of Baku. I also participated in the event ***Road to Marrakech***, organized by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for International Migration, and by Brazil, Canada, Bahrain, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines and Turkey. This event was devised to build momentum towards the Inter-governmental Conference that would take place in Morocco in December 2018. Lastly, I took part in an event organized by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations in New York.

Towards the end of September, I had a **meeting of the Americas Society/Council of the Americas with Mr. Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of Spain**. I then attended the **Non-Communicable Diseases meeting**, specifically the panels on strengthening health systems and financing for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, and on opportunities and challenges in engaging governments, civil society and the private sector at global, regional and national levels, both held in the Trusteeship Council Chamber.

I also participated in the **in-person meeting of the High-level Steering Group for Every Women Every Child (EWEK)**, of which the IPU is a member, at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The session was chaired by the United Nations Secretary-General and served to review the **2018 Report of the Independent Accountability Panel for EWEK**. It also focused on the Global Financing Facility Replenishment Roadmap, and heard updates from members, including the Partnership for Maternal,

Newborn and Child Health. The members provided feedback and identified concrete measures for support and outreach.

Alongside Mr. Kosachev, the Vice-President of the Executive Committee, we proposed the organization of an **SDGs financing workshop at the United Nations Office at Geneva, with the support of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development**. This workshop focused on how public resources contribute to the effective attainment of the SDGs and reviewed some of the most urgent steps parliaments can take to increase public revenue and strengthen fiscal policy in a way that is consistent with the Goals. It also reflected on ways in which development can support these efforts in some countries.

For the first time in the IPU's history – and with a conviction and commitment to democratize and decentralize our Organization's decision-making processes – **the composition of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 World Conference of Speakers was no longer determined by the Presidency and the Secretariat**. Instead, **this decision was now made in consultation with the geopolitical groups**, which were asked to present representation proposals during the 139th IPU Assembly.

I am committed to the promises I made to our Members. As such, **I have worked constantly to ensure that the quality of our events is elevated, both in terms of conceptual depth and in the selection of panellists**. This has not been an easy task, as some budget adjustments have had to be made to ensure the participation of high-level guests, who often require payment for their work or travel expenses. Due to these circumstances, I believed it was important and necessary to make budget revisions that would allow the IPU to increase the level and quality of our Assemblies and events, including: overseeing the consolidation of our institution to give it more relevance and attain more confirmations; and reserving trips in economy class, so as to include other daily allowances during the events.

As many parliaments around the world have focused on austerity measures and more efficient spending, the IPU has had to do the same. The use of our resources was streamlined to attend to these urgent needs, so as to promote and strengthen the reputation of our institution, including the contacting and funding of high-level guests and panellists.

Lastly, being guided by the commitments I made during my campaign for the IPU Presidency, **I kept in close contact with the geopolitical groups. Alongside the Executive Committee, I have been pushing for the elaboration of projects and initiatives to innovate on the basis of the IPU's existing efforts.**

Our Organization has not yet taught us to work as a team, or to develop networks. **We go abroad from our respective countries, we prepare important resolutions, but we know very little about our colleagues around the world.** Dear friends, **the main strength of the IPU is its people, that group of more than 46,000 parliamentarians across the globe, the thousands of members who attend our events, the great leaders who meet during the Assemblies.** I also made an additional effort to organize new spaces for dialogue. While most of



IPU Geopolitical Groups.

them were not officially part of the programmes, nor funded with IPU resources (they came from national budgets), they allowed us to get to know each other better and foster communication bridges between our nations.

Beginning of the second year: October 2018 to March 2019



139th IPU Assembly. © IPU

The **139th IPU Assembly** focused on the overall theme, *Parliamentary leadership in promoting peace and development in the age of innovation and technological change*. For my opening address, I encouraged people to embrace change, innovation, science and technology, and to keep up with the times. As parliamentarians, it is imperative that we remain seized of technological progress. The Assembly aimed to strengthen dialogue between the political and scientific communities.

Several meetings of the Executive Committee were held throughout the Assembly. I also had detailed conversations with the presidents of the Twelve Plus, Asia Pacific and Eurasia geopolitical groups, the Presidents of the IPU Committees, and several Speakers of parliament and delegates. I can gladly recognize that these working meetings were very productive, and encouraged us to keep on working on our pending issues as an Organization. Furthermore, taking into account that, from the 750 parliamentarians that comprise the IPU, only 32.4 per cent are women, I did not want to miss the opportunity to also gather and exchange ideas and visions with the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the group that leads our political work to redress the gender imbalance in political representation. Keeping up with the gender agenda is one of my strongest commitments as IPU President. Consequently, I continued



139th IPU Assembly. © IPU



139th IPU Assembly. © IPU

to push it forward in the year-and-a-half that followed, in close collaboration with men and women who globally foster equitable gender representation.

We started innovating with many new side events and workshops that were included on the agenda, such as a **fake news workshop**, the **CEDAW seminar**, the **launch of an IPU-PACE study regarding violence against women**, the **science and policy panel**, and a **knowledge fair for invited organizations to display their current technological projects**. While making new additions and changes has not been an easy task, I am certain that, with your feedback, proposals and the work of the Secretariat, we have taken steps in the right direction to hold better and more useful Assemblies for parliamentarians around the world. It is also important to note that – as promised during my campaign – lunch meetings with regional parliaments were included, as I firmly believe the IPU must become a platform for strengthening regional and national dialogue that will, in turn, enhance cooperation and international partnerships.



139th IPU Assembly. © IPU

Immediately after our 139th Assembly, the third semester of activities of the Presidency started. **The first activity was part of the World Investment Forum in Geneva.** Thanks to the invitation of UNCTAD Secretary General Mukhisa Kituyi, I participated in the Forum's inauguration ceremony. It was the



World Investment Forum 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland.

first time that a legislator had participated in this important high-level multi-stakeholder gathering, and also the first time in the ten years of the Forum's existence that the Presidency of the IPU had participated.

The first activity held as part of this event was a workshop for parliamentarians, ***Financing the SDGs: How can parliaments bridge the gap?*** It was organized by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the UN Sustainable Development Group and the IPU. The World Investment Report 2014 estimates that the annual investment gap in key SDG sectors in developing countries is an average of USD 2.5 trillion per year. Therefore, the focus of the workshop was on how to reduce this tremendous gap and how to finance the 2030 Agenda at country level. **National parliaments play a prominent role in that regard, since they have the responsibility of identifying reform priorities and drafting new legislation that helps to create a favourable SDG environment at the legislative level.** To address this purpose, the issues discussed revolved around: innovative approaches and key financing means to achieve the SDGs; interaction between parliaments, policymakers and the private sector; oversight of budgeting; investment policies; and other ways to better deliver on sustainable development. During my intervention, it was stressed that the work of legislators is a necessary condition to give certainty, and establish an adequate legal framework to pave the way towards the creation of attractive and safe environments for sustainable investment, thereby ensuring economic development and, most of all, better living conditions for our societies.



Workshop for parliamentarians on "Financing the SDGs: How can parliaments bridge the gap?" © IPU

Later on, I had the great pleasure of addressing the inauguration of the sixth **World Humanitarian Forum (Baku International Humanitarian Forum)** in Azerbaijan. This event gathered political, scientific and cultural leaders of the world community, whose aim was to hold dialogues and discussions, and exchange views on a wide range of global issues in the interest of all humanity. On this occasion, it was essential for me to speak in favour of multilateralism, recognizing the big threats it faces nowadays, such as populism, nationalism and misinformation.

In the framework of this event, I was glad to meet with the **President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev**, address the IPU agenda, and talk about the then upcoming session of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, the aim of which was to allow young parliamentarians to have better problem-solving tools, and to legislate in favour of the generations to come. Along with the **Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, the Chairman of the National Assembly, Mr. Ogtay Asadov, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Valeh Alasgarov, and the Minister of Youth and Sport, Mr. Azad Rahimov**, we talked about all the details pending in the organization of the upcoming forum.

Later on, **the FAO Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition took place in Madrid, Spain**. This was the first meeting of its kind, seeking to advance the political will to achieve SDG 2 at the international level. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in the past 20 years, the number of people suffering from hunger has fallen significantly. However, this trend saw a reversal in 2016 as a consequence of climate change and declining economic growth, among other reasons. **To exemplify this situation, a total of 821 million people were undernourished in the world in 2017, up from 815 million in 2016. Bearing this in mind, the summit was an opportunity to remind us of the important**

role that we, as members of legislative bodies, play in helping our countries to achieve hunger-free societies, and consequently, to advance towards allowing our people to live with dignity.

As President of the IPU, **I reported on the work we have already done with the FAO and PMNCH to develop ideas for parliamentary tools to improve legislation on malnutrition, diabetes, obesity and being overweight, among others.**

These would be useful for national legislators, who could benefit from the experience of the FAO, and consequently, help us implement laws that can most effectively tackle nutrition-related problems. Maintaining close ties with the international community is one of our inherent duties. Therefore, being in coordination with United Nations activities is fundamental to creating synergies, achieving our shared goals and making our actions stronger and more meaningful.

Being part of the global community also means being aware of the discussions held in diverse multilateral forums and the agreements they achieve. The G20 summit is nowadays one of the most relevant multilateral gatherings in the world, and therefore a high-level dialogue mechanism that MPs should be attentive to. **Five years ago, we held a P20 meeting in Mexico. That brought together legislators from these 20 economies that represent 85 per cent of the world's GDP and two thirds of the global population.** Taking this event as an example, at the initiative of the IPU, and with the support of Argentina, **a P20 Speakers of Parliament summit took place for the first time, in parallel to the G20, and ten years after the first G20 summit was held in Buenos Aires.** This event provided the Speakers of the G20 and other invited parliaments with the opportunity to obtain expertise and first-hand knowledge on the theme of the G20 summit, ***Building consensus for fair and sustainable development***, as well as on how to build such a consensus.



FAO Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition. © IPU



P-20 Summit in Buenos Aires. © IPU

This would also support future parliamentary action designed to support fair and sustainable development.

The P20 Summit reached an agreement in the form of a joint declaration stating that the loss of confidence in democracy had led to the emergence of authoritarian and populist trends in governments. Overall, we acknowledged the fact that

the defence of rights and freedoms had vanished in the face of higher insecurity and lower economic growth, which restrained opportunities for new generations. The parliamentarians of the 20 largest economies (except the United States and Australia who could not attend due to election periods) made commitments and adopted the declaration by consensus, which was an important step for global parliamentary diplomacy.



Head of the Parliamentary Delegation of Spain to the IPU, Mr. José Ignacio Echániz. © IPU

Also, in the framework of the meeting of Speakers of Parliaments of the P20 countries, I met with **Mr. Emilio Monzó, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina, Mr. Federico Pinedo, Provisional President of the Senate, and Ms. Gabriela Michetti, Vice President of Argentina**, to exchange opinions on public policies, and especially to foster the true empowerment of women. I also had the pleasure of meeting the **President of the Lok Sabha of India, Ms. Sumitra Maharani**, to talk about the creation of the national parliamentary chapters of the United Nations agenda, *Every Woman, Every Child*, which is a project aimed at the implementation of maternal, neonatal, infant and adolescent health programmes. I also had the opportunity to converse with **Ms. Ana Pastor Julián, President of the Congress of Deputies of Spain, and Ms. Maya Alejandra Fernández Allende, the second woman**

to preside over the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, about the gender inclusion agenda and the need to seek tools to generate true female empowerment. Last but not least, in a very productive dialogue with **Mr. Li Jianguo, Vice-President of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China**, we agreed to keep on pushing forward an economic and legislative agenda to defend multilateralism and foster the SDG Agenda.

In November, I visited Spain to take part in several



P-20 Summit in Buenos Aires. © IPU



Visit to Spain. © IPU

IPU-related work meetings with Mr. José Ignacio Echániz, head of the parliamentary delegation of Spain to the IPU, and Mr. Pío García Escudero and Ms. Ana Pastor, Presidents of the Senate and the Congress of Deputies of Spain respectively. The work done together with the Spanish delegation focused on the migration, peace and security agenda, in alignment with and supporting the guidelines of the Global Compact on Migration, drafted under the auspices of the United Nations.

Subsequently, **a regional seminar was held on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was organized by Israel for the Twelve Plus geopolitical group of the IPU and for the parliaments of East Asia.** At the opening of this seminar, I emphasized the need to keep in mind the inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda; the importance of continuing to focus on not leaving anyone behind; and the decisive role that parliaments play in defending this agenda and democratic principles.



IPU President and the Speaker of the Knesset Yuli Edelstein.

On this occasion, I had the pleasure of meeting **with the Presidents of the Parliament of Israel (Mr. Yuli Edelstein) and the Parliament of Cyprus (Mr. Demetris Syllouris).** We spoke of the need to give greater visibility and relevance to the IPU as a platform for dialogue among parliaments, so as to promote more inclusive and development-oriented policies in the almost

180 countries that are part of our Organization. I was also able to talk with parliamentarians from different political parties in Israel to find out their perspectives and proposals regarding conflicts in the region, and to acquire a more comprehensive view of this undeniably complex issue.

Later on, it was time to address an issue of a different nature: technology and communication. Organized by the IPU every two years, **the 2018 edition of the World eParliament Conference took place in December** in Geneva, Switzerland. Given that today, 70 per cent of parliamentarians use social media to communicate and engage with the public, this global gathering is a useful tool to analyse how parliaments are including technology in their activities to build more open, transparent and inclusive institutions.

On this occasion, the President of the Twelve Plus and MP Mr. Duarte Pacheco, attended the event in my place. There, he delivered an opening statement on the need to adopt new parliamentary practices that include technological innovations. However, he also noted it was necessary to bear in mind that these innovations did not automatically lead to positive developments for society. This therefore required us, as parliamentarians, to cooperate to make technology work for the good of everyone.

After visiting Israel, I was glad to be present at the **Parliamentary Conference on migration on the occasion of the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**, held in Rabat, Morocco in December. Given that 1 in 30 people are migrants, and taking into account the recent migratory crisis around the world, it is becoming more urgent than ever to give certainty to the global commitments made by our governments. Having a parliamentary backup for the Global Compact endows this agreement with certainty, and ensures that the necessary process of implementing and modifying laws in accordance with the Compact will take place.

In that spirit, two intense days of work in Morocco took place, during which, together with parliamentarians from all over the world, we sought ways to implement the Global Compact in our respective countries and to achieve the expected social benefits.



IPU President and Dr Saadeddine Othmani, Prime Minister of Morocco.

For this, I held meetings with the Presidents of the House of Representatives of Morocco, Mr. Habib elMalki, and the Chamber of Counsellors, Mr. Hakim Benchamach, in order to organize the first parliamentary congress for the implementation of the Global Compact. I also spoke with Dr. Saadeddine Othmani, Prime Minister of Morocco, to exchange views on best public policy practices to generate development conditions.



Mr. Habib El Malki, President of the House of Representatives of Morocco. © IPU

Just after addressing the topic of migration – one of the most contentious issues that the world faces today – it was time to move to another momentous topic: climate change. The IPU, together with the Polish Sejm, organized a **parliamentary meeting at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP24)** that took place in the city of Krakow, Poland.

As the President of the IPU, and in alliance with legislators from around the world, we presented a parliamentary guide aiming to help countries establish better instruments to legislate in compliance with the objectives established in the Paris Agreement. According to the parliamentary guide, the minimum criteria that all legislation must contain include: **1) quantifiable results of legislation on this matter, along with clear periods of implementation and a means of ensuring that the executing authorities are clearly identified;** and **2) the establishment of fiscal incentives that motivate social and private agents to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases.** Overall, this event was helpful in stressing the need to work on legislation that could serve as a formal framework for sound environmental and social policies at the local and regional level, to protect communities that are most vulnerable to environmental impacts, and create the conditions for sustainable economic development.

Another topic I had the opportunity to address in the second half of the last year was maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health. **Around 3.2 million children and adolescents lost their lives as a result of preventable or treatable infectious diseases or injuries in 2017. Forty-three per cent of children under five years old do not enjoy the right conditions for their optimal development and, between 2005 and 2016, one in five girls, adolescents and women were victims of physical or sexual violence.** With this in mind, on 12 and 13 December, I attended the **Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Partners' Forum 2018**, held in New Delhi, India. Together with the **Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi**, we presented substantive policy criteria designed to benefit the health of women and children.

Furthermore, along with the Prime Minister of India, the Chair of the PMNCH, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare of India, the President of the African Youth and Adolescent Network and the Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal, **I participated in the inauguration of the Partners' Forum.** I addressed the role of women in politics, particularly in defending women's and children's rights, and opposing the disadvantages still faced by women parliamentarians over access to positions in political bodies. I also stressed the urgent need for lawmakers to move from words to actions in the design and approval of laws that guarantee the health of people – especially women – through public systems with sufficient medical personnel, equipment and medicine supplies, as well as public policies that encourage prevention.



Parliamentary Meeting at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP24). © IPU



Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Partners' Forum 2018. © UIP

Of the legislative commitments achieved, one of the most sensitive seeks to generate better conditions for maternal, neonatal and infant health, not only because it is a human right, but also because of existing inequalities that women face in accessing medical services. We also agreed on working groups and committees to oversee the implementation of **the 2012 IPU resolution, *Access to health as a basic right: The role of parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children.*** We hope to develop, through these committees, action plans that identify concrete measures to achieve compliance at the national level, and follow up on the implementation of these commitments with the help of the IPU Advisory Group on Health.

half of the global population is less than 30 years old, yet only 1.9 per cent of legislators are in this age group. This suggests a significant problem of underrepresentation of young people in the world's parliaments. Taking this into account, the Forum sought to encourage parliamentarians to come up with better public policies that promoted real youth empowerment through education, job opportunities, scholarship programmes, and the inclusion of technological resources, among other things. **Young parliamentarians are a priority group on my agenda.** That is why it is of great importance to continually make efforts to ensure that young people are adequately represented in legislative bodies.

A few days later, **the Doha Forum** took place in Doha, Qatar. This event served as a platform for high-level political dialogue on **shaping policy in an interconnected world**, focusing essentially on security, peace, mediation and economic development topics. Whilst there, I seized the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister of Qatar, **Mr. Abdulla bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani**, and with the Speaker of the Shura Council, **Mr. Ahmad bin Abdullah alMahmoud**, to discuss the agenda for **the 140th Assembly**. Together, we made progress in coming up with thematic workshops and seminars that we considered to be most appropriate and helpful for us when bringing proposals for law and public policies to our countries. By then, we had already discussed and planned to have a high-level dialogue



Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, in Baku, Azerbaijan, December 2018.

As planned during the Baku International Humanitarian Forum, December saw the celebration of the **Fifth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Baku, Azerbaijan**. Today, almost

table for Speakers of parliaments; a workshop on maternal, child and adolescent health; and a workshop on legislation to prevent and combat terrorism, among others.



Fifth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. © UIP

In December, I visited Palestine and held a meeting with the **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine, Dr. Riad Malki**, as well as with the delegation of parliamentarians of **the Palestinian Legislative Council**, to exchange views on the political and human rights situation in the region. **We also had a conversation on the diplomatic paths towards peace in the Middle East. We agreed that taking into account the participation of legislators and the IPU might be helpful in this process.**

I also visited Israel in December, **where I met with the Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Yuli Edelstein, and with the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Avi Dichter.** We talked about work between the IPU and the Knesset,



Talks between Gabriela Cuevas Barron and Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Palestinian National Authority.
© IPU

highlighting the IPU as a platform that promotes dialogue in the region and pursues peaceful solutions.

Furthermore, I had the honour of meeting **His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud** in Saudi Arabia on 8 January. We had a very interesting exchange of views on the role of legislatures in solving social problems, human rights challenges and global security. Additionally, in a meeting with the **Chairman of the Shura Council, Dr. Abdullah Mohammed Ibrahim al-Sheikh**, we discussed the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the IPU, and possible areas for further and deeper cooperation.



Prime Minister of Qatar, Abdulla Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron.

Continuing on my working tour, and as part of IRENA, the **Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency** (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 10–17 January 2019), it was a pleasure to have a very enriching meeting with **the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**. It was good to note that the Crown Prince is committed to and shares the objectives of the IPU, fostering gender equality and tolerance in his country



IPU President with the King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.



Shura Council, Ahmad Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron.



IPU President with the Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan

through legal reforms and executive actions. We also talked about human rights, the fight against terrorism, global trade and the importance of investment in generating employment and opportunities. On this same visit, **I met Ms. Amal al-Qubaisi, President of the Federal National Council** and the first female to lead a national assembly in the United Arab Emirates and the region. **She is undoubtedly a great example of women's empowerment and women's inclusion in parliament – a goal the IPU strongly pursues.**

As for my participation in the IRENA Assembly, it was an auspicious opportunity to reflect on the importance of parliamentarians committing to pushing forward the renewable energy agenda. The importance of pursuing this objective naturally relates to climate change but also to social inclusion. Since it has become clear that traditional ways of generating and distributing energy will not be able to provide full and inclusive energy access, **renewable energies might be the only way this can happen.** It is now necessary to think of effective changes in this area, linking, for the good of our societies, the climate change and social inclusion agendas, both of which are key to the SDGs. IRENA has proven to be a crucial agent in leading this process.

I visited Kuwait, and was honoured to meet **His Highness Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad-al-Jaber Al Sabah.** The Emir maintains a policy of dialogue and creates bridges of understanding in the region. In addition, his leadership in raising funds for the benefit of refugees has helped millions of people. For this reason, during our meeting we discussed the role the IPU plays in this regard, and our responsibility within the global and national humanitarian agenda. I also had the opportunity of meeting with **Mr. Marzouq Ali al-Ghanim, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait.**



Visit to Kuwait. © IPU



Meeting with H.M. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. © IPU

As part of my working meetings in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, I also visited Bahrain. During that visit, it was an honour to meet with **His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa** to discuss **the importance of tolerance and dialogue in generating a stable international environment.** It was also a pleasure to meet the first woman elected as a Speaker of parliament in the region, **Ms. Fawzia Abdulla Yusuf Zainal, whose voice in favour of women will always be important for the IPU, and a positive example of gender equality.**



Gabriela Cuevas Barron visits Oman. © IPU

With the **Chairperson of the Shura Council, Mr. Ali bin Saleh al-Saleh,** and my fellow legislators, we discussed the options for greater cooperation between the IPU and Bahrain. I also held working meetings **with Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, President of the Supreme Council for Women; the Minister of the Interior, Sheikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa; and the President of the National Institute for Human Rights, Ms. Maria Khoury.**

Moreover, during my visit to the Arabian peninsula, I was able to conduct important meetings in Oman. On this occasion, a very interesting exchange of ideas and legislative proposals took place with the **President of the Consultative Council, Sheikh Khalid bin Hilal Al Mawali, and the President of the State Council, Mr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh alManthri,** as well as with parliamentary colleagues. We talked about options for cooperation between the IPU and Oman, and the possibility of carrying out new regional projects. I also met with **His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister,** with whom I had a very productive and interesting exchange of ideas. **Oman is a young country that is beginning to build its institutions more representatively and inclusively, while at the same time maintaining its traditions and values in a tolerant and open manner. We agreed on the necessity of multilateral parliamentary dialogue, in which the IPU is essential.**



Meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. © IPU

Once my working tour in the Middle East was over, it was time for me to preside over the **first meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Geneva, Switzerland**. The Fifth World Conference is of the utmost importance in the defence of multilateralism, the construction of a more inclusive world through the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda, and the strengthening of parliaments as the most important institution of citizen representation. For this event to be developed successfully, **I chaired the four meetings of the Preparatory Committee to discuss all the necessary arrangements and**, along with the **President of the Serbian Parliament, Ms. Maja Gojković**, we seized the occasion to have a signing ceremony that acknowledged Serbia as host of the 141st IPU Assembly.

During that weekend, we gathered for four different meetings and worked on ways to: bring parliaments closer to our citizens; design institutions that invigorate democratic governance; develop action plans to prioritize families who wish to be included in better development policies; provide for solutions to the challenges posed by possible future economic downturns (especially in terms of jobs and wages); and come up with strategies to tackle climate change and the enormous social inequality that still continues to afflict our societies, among other topics.

In February, **a hearing of the Arab Parliament took place in Cairo, Egypt** that aimed to discuss the removal of Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, and to exchange different views among participants. On this occasion, the President of the Twelve Plus geopolitical group, Mr. Duarte Pacheco, attended in my place, just as Ms. Ulrika Karlsson did in September 2018 during the first Arab regional seminar on the implementation of the SDGs. Maintaining the presence and participation of the IPU in regional and parliamentary gatherings is of high importance. This is because they represent the efforts of neighbouring nations to cooperate and coordinate for the good of their people, which is, in essence, what the IPU tries to foster.

In February, we had our annual hearing at the United Nations, convened by the President of the United Nations General Assembly and the Presidency of the IPU. This year's hearing reviewed the multilateral system, and in so doing, was a platform to discuss

how national politics and institutions can bolster all aspects of the multilateral system. On this occasion, I was very pleased to have a conversation with the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and the President of the General Assembly, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés. The conversation was also attended by my colleagues, the President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, Ms. Susan Kihika; the Vice-President of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, Ms. Safa alHashem; the Speaker of the Shura Council, Mr. Ahmad bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud; **and part of the team from the IPU Secretariat. We talked about the importance of the relationship between the United Nations and the IPU, and reaffirmed the commitment of the IPU to the sustainable development agenda.** The next day, together with **UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Under Secretary General, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, and President of the IPU Standing Committee on Peace and International Security, Mr. José Ignacio Echániz**, we discussed strengthening UN-IPU cooperation to counter terrorism together.



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2019. © IPU



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2019. © IPU

As President of the IPU, I am certain that defending multilateralism is fundamental to allowing us to continue facing our common challenges together, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In a time of low trust in the democratic model of governance, standing up for multilateralism is indispensable. With this in mind, I was honoured to address the **Annual Parliamentary Hearing** with a speech that stressed the need to regard the defence of multilateralism as a way of safeguarding the national interest. We



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2019. © IPU



First meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 5th World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments 2019. © IPU/Jorky



UN Secretary-General, António Guterres and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron.
© UN Photo/Loey Felipe

face many common problems that we cannot fight alone; today more than ever, togetherness is imperative.

A few weeks later, it was time to go back to United Nations Headquarters, but this time to attend the **63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)**, where social protection

systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls was discussed. I took part in a high-profile panel, which was a dialogue between international civil society leaders and women parliamentary leaders on promoting the human rights of women and girls at the international and national levels of governance. I was glad to share my experiences in this field, most of all because of my great commitment to the gender agenda.

The second day of CSW63 was very exciting, since I took part in two different side events and a press conference. The first was **the high-level event, *Women in Power*, organized by the President of the General Assembly**. I had the opportunity to make an intervention about the need to keep on working to achieve gender parity and to make 50 per cent women's representation in parliament and government a global objective. I then participated in **the event on sexual violence, which was organized jointly by the IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**. In this panel we discussed ways to prevent and combat sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, as well as steps that need to be taken to avoid violence against women in the context of elections. Over



Sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63). © IPU



Sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63). © IPU



IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron on Parliamentary Day, UN Women CSW63. © Joel Thomas Sheakoski

the past three years, we have worked with a particular emphasis on preventing and combating violence against women. The IPU has taken on a noteworthy leadership role, and I have found synergistic bodies that still collaborate with the Organization to this date, such as the League of Women Voters. Furthermore, in coordination with the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations, we are continuously advancing this essential agenda within the biennial resolution.

On 13 March, there was an IPU parliamentary meeting, where the main goal was to share good practices developed by parliaments on how to pass laws on, allocate budgets to, and conduct oversight of gender-responsive social protection systems that women can effectively access and benefit from. Finally, **I participated in the side event, *Critical mass to gender parity – women in government DO make a difference!*** Along with other high-level women panellists, and in partnership with several NGOs, such as the League of Women Voters, we discussed how women leaders have brought about positive change, especially in the area of social

protection programmes, and in efforts to eliminate gender-based violence against women. **I took this opportunity to stress how important it was to make politics a safe place for women, and how violence against women should never be normalized or disregarded, as women still suffer from it.** The picture of politics and power is changing as more women enter politics. We need more women in power, so that younger generations get inspired and magnify this movement.

Halfway through the Presidency: March 2019 to October 2019

The IPU has been raising awareness, imparting information, and organizing capacitybuilding seminars, workshops and regional meetings to commit parliaments to the implementation of the SDGs. **Never before have awareness-raising and SDG implementation activities been so critical in holding world leaders to account for their pledge and commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

After our 140th Assembly, I attended **the Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany**, which was a ground-breaking annual event powered by the United Nations SDG Action Campaign, with the support of the German Federal

Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the German Federal Foreign Office, and other partners. In one of the panel discussions, I addressed the plenary. I also gave several interviews to the local media, participated in workshops at all events to explain what the IPU does, and shared the best examples that I have found in national parliaments.

With the assumption that the SDGs would only be achieved if everyone took action, the festival highlighted and celebrated innovators, mobilizers and change-makers that were joining the global movement for the SDGs. With over 1,500 participants from all over the world from a wide range of sectors (national





140th IPU Assembly. © IPU

and local government, youth, civil society, private sector, foundations, media and music sector), **the Global Festival of Action** provided an opportunity for scaling up and broadening the global movement for the SDGs, and for forging new partnerships and coalitions for the Goals. This year's edition focused on the road map leading up to key milestones, such as **the 2019 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**, where the SDGs were to be at the forefront of the discussions held by Heads of State.

Given the importance of working harder on the SDGs, I travelled to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to attend the **second regional seminar for the Asia-Pacific region parliaments on achieving the SDGs**. The State Great Hural of Mongolia and the IPU jointly organized the seminar. It built on the conclusions of the previous regional summits and welcomed the active engagement of all participants, as well as the rich contribution of parliamentarians, government representatives, United Nations experts, the IPU and civil society.



Second Regional Seminar for the Asia-Pacific Region Parliaments on Achieving Sustainable Development Goals. © IPU

A series of plenary panel discussions, with relevant experts as panellists, were held during the seminar. More focused round-table discussions followed. **The overall aim of the meeting was for parliaments from the Asia-Pacific region to share experiences and engage in comprehensive discussions on the most efficient ways to institutionalize the SDGs and**



Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development. © IPU

ensure that nobody was left behind. The seminar served as an important platform to allow participants to get acquainted with good practices in developing effective parliamentary strategies for SDG implementation.

After the opening ceremony, with Mr. Khaltmaagiin Battulga, President of Mongolia, I attended a meeting of all Speakers and heads of delegation. I also had interesting exchanges during bilateral high-level meetings with the **Speaker of the State Great Hural of Mongolia, Mr. Gombojav Zandanshatar, the Prime Minister, Mr. Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh, and again with the President, Mr. Khaltmaagiin Battulga.** I express my gratitude to the parliamentary and governmental authorities of Mongolia for their warm reception.

On 2 June 2019, **I attended the celebration organized by the Hungarian National Assembly for the IPU's 130th anniversary.** Hungary, the first country in Central Europe to host an IPU conference in 1896, and which also hosted events in 1936 and 1989, published an excellent history of the IPU.

I thank the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Péter Szijjártó, and the National Assembly Speaker, Mr. László Kövér, for the opportunity to have an exchange on strengthening collaboration with the IPU. **We considered solutions for designing parliaments that are closer to the people, are more efficient, and that restore citizens' confidence.** I also had the opportunity to meet with the Hungarian National Group of the IPU and engaged in interesting conversations with committees and authorities that are working closely on the humanitarian agenda and gender issues.



Celebration organized by the Hungarian National Assembly on the occasion of the IPU's 130th anniversary. © IPU

I congratulate the leadership of Hungary for organizing, as a founding member of the IPU, the first commemoration of the IPU's 130th anniversary. I also thank them for the opportunity to renew our commitment to democracy and human rights.

The 2019 Women Deliver conference was held from 3 to 6 June 2019 in Vancouver, Canada. The *Women Deliver* conference takes place every three years, bringing together high-level representatives from across a multitude of sectors, issues and cultures. The conference describes itself as a fuelling station from which organizations and individuals leave re-energized, knowledgeable, connected and challenged to think outside the box. Around 5,759 participants from 169 countries and 2,500 unique organizations attended the conference.

Ms. Undraa Agvaanluvsan, an MP from Mongolia, attended on my behalf the **Parliamentary Forum at the Women Deliver conference**. She talked about the importance of budget accountability in anti-corruption efforts, and highlighted that an active civil society was key for accountability, and that smart budgeting was a paramount factor for achieving the SDGs.

The commemoration in Hungary was followed by a **regional seminar in Lisbon, Portugal on achieving the SDGs**. The seminar was an opportunity to strengthen parliamentary relations and reaffirm commitment to the SDGs. It focused mainly on SDG 3 (good health and well-being), an issue which is vitally important because of rapid urbanization in the world over the last 50 years. It is expected that in 2050, 68 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas, which will be a new health and environmental challenge. I took part in the opening and closing



Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Lisbon, Portugal. © IPU

sessions and had meetings with the **President of the Twelve Plus Group, Mr. Duarte Pacheco, and with the Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, Mr. Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues**. We recognized the importance of promoting industry, innovation and infrastructure, and making investments in renewable energy, public transport and health.

For five years, the IPU has tried to organize a mission to Turkey to meet with the parliamentary and governmental authorities, civil society, and various actors in connection with the complaints that the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians (CHRP) had received.

A delegation of the Executive Committee and the CHRP went **on a mission to Turkey** with the aim of gathering more information and gaining knowledge about the political and security reality in the country. **For four days, we worked in the capital, Ankara, in the southeast of Turkey, in Diyarbakir, and in Istanbul.** The IPU delegation held numerous meetings with, among others: **the President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Mr. Mustafa Şentop, all political parties represented in parliament, representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Constitutional Court, civil society organizations, governors and mayors.** The report on the mission was presented to the Turkish delegation to the IPU. Later, during our work in Serbia, it was discussed at the Executive Committee, the CHRP and the Assembly.

In addition to this intense agenda, as Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees on the planet, we presented to our interlocutors **the handbook for parliamentarians, A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems.**

I thank the President of the Grand National Assembly, Mr. M. Şentop, and Dr. R. Kavakçı Kan, for their openness, and for having invited the IPU to visit.

In June, Mr. Ganzorigiin Temuulen, an MP from Mongolia, and Mr. Frately Fouty, an MP from Gabon and member of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians, visited Senegal and The Gambia to represent the IPU as part of a four-day field visit hosted by the World Bank. They witnessed the impact of **World Bank Group**

projects on the ground and learned about Senegal's and The Gambia's development progress. In addition to firsthand insight into how development projects are implemented, the field visit provided parliamentarians and civil society organization representatives with a deeper understanding of the development context in these countries through briefings and engagement with local communities, stakeholders and government officials.

From 19 to 21 June 2019, Mr. José Ignacio Echániz, an MP from Spain and President of the Committee on Peace and International Security, represented the IPU at **a meeting on the nexus of security and population movements, organized in Turkey by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean**. The objective of the meeting was to analyse, from a legislative perspective, current population movements in the region and the rest of the world, and their long-term implications in terms of security, and to seek opportunities for action. Learning about the experience of other regions in the world regarding these movements enriched us with international experience. The exchange of ideas allowed us to collectively address the situation.

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, MP from Portugal and President of the Twelve Plus Group, represented the IPU at the **26th General Assembly of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, whose main subject was the contribution of parliamentarism in understanding modern political and social phenomena**. The Assembly took place in June 2019 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The Assembly discussions focused on the uncertainty people nowadays faced due to technological changes and the globalization of trade. It aimed to deepen understanding of the alterations to the political and social order as a consequence of these phenomena. As a result, democratic models of governance would be challenged in terms of their capability to face today's problems and their readiness to deliver solutions. Unfortunately, the event faced some political problems and had to be suspended.

I was invited by the Majles Shoraye Eslami (Islamic Parliament of Iran) to visit Iran. I held a number of high-level meetings. The agenda included working meetings with **the President**

of Iran, Mr. Hassan Rouhani; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Javad Zarif; the President of the Parliament, Mr. Ali Larijani; my parliamentary colleagues who are members of the Iranian Inter-Parliamentary Group; and a group of women MPs. At these meetings we sought to promote cooperation between parliaments to address the problems facing the world today: unilateralism and the violation of international law. The IPU was founded 130 years ago as a platform for parliamentary dialogue and as a means for peace. Today we must underline that we have the responsibility to promote multilateralism as the best option to resolve regional and world challenges.

As a continuation of our IPU celebrations, I had the great honour of visiting Cyprus. **I addressed the Vouli Antiprosopon (House of Representatives) plenary session in June.** I stressed the need to work on the 130th IPU anniversary and on international cooperation that generates well-being, peace, and economic growth for our people. The IPU renewed its commitment to the people it represented through democracy, human rights and international law. That was an opportunity to design inclusive, transparent and effective public institutions, like the one the Cypriot Parliament was setting up – the Parallel Parliament.

It was a great honour that I had the opportunity to engage in an open, purposeful and productive dialogue with **the President of Cyprus, Mr. Nicos Anastasiades; the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nikos Christodoulides; Archbishop Chrysostomos II;** and in particular, the **President of the House of Representatives, Mr. Demetris Syllouris.**

At the Quintet meeting that was held on 30 June 2019 at IPU Headquarters in Geneva, the IPU celebrated its 130th anniversary and the International Day of Parliamentarism. I would like to express my gratitude to **the Speakers Ms. Valentina Matvienko of the Council of the Federation in Russia, Mr. Ahmad alMahmoud of the Shura Council in Qatar, and Ms. Maja Gojković of the National Assembly of Serbia** for their contributions. The Quintet meeting was an opportunity to reflect on the IPU's achievements, especially at a time when multilateralism is being questioned more than ever.



President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Hassan Rouhani.

As the oldest multilateral political organization in the world, it is the IPU's duty to redefine what we expect from multilateralism and put it at the service of all the people we represent. Undeniably, governance in the twenty-first century demands more active solutions and innovative institutions. Today, 130 years after its founding, the IPU and the parliamentarians that comprise it have the potential to lead the way in redefining multilateralism for the good of all.



2019 Quintet meeting at IPU Headquarters. © IPU Flickr

Immediately after the Quintet meeting, I visited Moscow to address **the International Forum on the Development of International Parliamentarism**. We discussed the interlinked problems that we face in our countries and shared our experiences of how we were trying to solve them. Dialogues – which seek cooperation and positive exchanges – are an indispensable part of parliamentary diplomacy.

The IPU has to put people at the centre of our decisions. It is our mandate to translate international commitments into local realities. Governance today demands more active parliamentarians and faster answers to the challenges that citizens face.



UNOCT African Regional High-Level Conference on Counter Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism.

In July, I attended the **UN Office of Counter-Terrorism African Regional High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism**, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. The issues discussed related to terrorism and agreements, from the parliamentary perspective, on the implementation of measures to reduce violence in this region and the world. It was an honour to share the opening of

this event with **United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, the President of Kenya, Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, and the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov.**

As President of the IPU, I participated in the **United Nations panel, *Review of SDG implementation and interrelations among goals: Discussion on SDG 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions***. This was part of the **United Nations Highlevel Political Forum held in New York**. It was underlined that **women represented half of the global population, yet occupied only 24 per cent of parliamentary seats. It was clear that better representation was urgently needed.** In a meeting with **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women**, we agreed on a series of important actions that the IPU must carry out with national parliaments to eliminate laws that discriminate against women. **We must work for fair representation; only then can we talk about democratic, representative and inclusive parliaments.**



United Nations High-level Political Forum, 2019.

It was a very interesting week, as **the IPU's parliamentary meeting during the High-level Political Forum was upgraded, after three years, to a halfday special event, and entitled a Parliamentary Forum. This is important: as more parliamentarians are being included in their national delegations, our colleagues are becoming more engaged in the national implementation of their development agenda, and parliamentary oversight is becoming a more common practice at the international level.** The forum had two panels: one on the main theme of the High-level Political Forum with a focus on Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and one on parliamentary action for the SDGs that reflected on a recent IPU survey report. With so many MPs at the United Nations, we seized the opportunity to host a reception celebrating the IPU's very successful 130th anniversary display at the United Nations visitor area.



Parliamentary Forum at the 2019 High-level Political Forum. © IPU Flickr

I also had the opportunity to meet with **Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy-Secretary-General of the United Nations.** We discussed the IPU's commitment regarding the 2030 Agenda and the need to strengthen the presence of women in parliaments. The opportunities to work together with the United Nations are plentiful.

In August, I was invited to attend **as Guest of Honour the 10th Conference of Speakers of African Parliaments.** The main theme of the conference was ***Towards durable solutions to forced migration to accelerate integration and development in Africa: The role of national and regional parliaments.*** As the IPU President, **I will always have immense gratitude to Africa**

for its invaluable support and commitment to work together in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that provides for greater inclusion and improvement of the quality of life for the people we represent, especially those in developing countries. Particularly, I would like to thank Mr. Roger Nkodo Dang, **President of the Pan-African Parliament.**

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, member of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal, attended on behalf of the IPU **Presidency the Fifth Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum in Nadi, Fiji.** The main theme of the forum was ***Climate Change and Health*** because the populations of this region had been affected by that phenomenon. The debate led to a final statement in which all 20 countries pledged to work to counteract climate change.

I chaired the opening session of the International High-level Conference, *Countering terrorism through innovative approaches and the use of new and emerging technologies.*

The conference, which was held in Minsk, Belarus, was organized by the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the United Nations Offices of Counter-Terrorism. It was a great honour to chair such an important plenary attended by the **President of Belarus, Mr. Alexander Lukashenko, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, and other important people.**



Opening session of the International High-Level Conference on "Countering terrorism through innovative approaches and the use of new and emerging technologies."



10th Conference of Speakers of African Parliaments.

The event brought together **Member States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** and the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations**. The conference focused on the following three themes: *the nature of threat – misuse of new technologies and artificial intelligence by terrorists; innovative use of new technologies to strengthen detection capacity; and the development of national, regional and international approaches and strategies to address the misuse of new technologies and artificial intelligence by terrorists.*

I would like to thank **Mr. Mohammed al-Karbouli, MP from Iraq**, and **Senator Abdul Rehman Malik** from Pakistan for having joined the IPU delegation. During our visit to Minsk, we met with the **Speakers of both Houses of the National Assembly of Belarus**, **Mr. Vladimir Andreichenko, Speaker of the House of Representatives**, and **Mr. Mikhail Myasnikov, Speaker of the Council of the Republic**. We also had an interesting exchange with the **Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Vladimir Makei**.

After visiting Belarus, I attended **the Third World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development, in Bali, Indonesia**. The main theme was *Combating inequality through social and financial inclusion*. We discussed financial inclusion as an important tool for achieving equality. Promoting equality must be a priority for our parliaments and governments. The commitment to peace also meant working on inclusion and social justice. I thanked Indonesian parliamentarians for organizing an inspiring dialogue and enabling productive exchanges with colleagues participating in the forum. Creating platforms for parliamentary communication was a great strategy to lead different countries and regions towards common solutions.

While in Asuncion, Paraguay, where I attended **the Sixth Conference of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU (9 and 10 September)**, I held a meeting on 7 September with the Chinese delegation. The meeting was highly productive in terms of establishing more collaborative work between China and the IPU. At the same time, we clarified and expressed clearly the IPU's position of recognizing only one China. **At the Conference, we worked together to find solutions for young people. We reviewed the new policies and laws in the world that were based on a happiness and well-being indicator that had been shown to be very effective in**

achieving the 2030 Agenda goals. We had a very busy schedule, which included the opening ceremony, a panel on the mentorship programme, a press conference, and many interviews for the national media. Paraguay and **Mr. Blas Llano, President of the Senate**, made a great effort to make the conference a reality. It was the first time that Paraguay had hosted an IPU event. I thank them very much for a hugely successful occasion.



Sixth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. © IPU Flickr

In New York, at the invitation of the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace, I attended the Council's panel discussion, Best practices in the promotion of tolerance around the globe. The objectives of the debate were: to spread awareness of the need to build inclusive and tolerant societies; to discuss the challenges to international cooperation when promoting the values of tolerance and acceptance of others between communities; to help explore opportunities to develop coordinated and proactive global responses to counter hate speech, racial and religious sectarianism, and discrimination; to highlight the importance of media, information and communication technology, and educational institutions in this area; and to foster the exchange of best practices and innovative mechanisms to establish peaceful societies, at national, regional and international levels.

That same day, I was invited by the **President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa**, to take part in the panel discussion, *The culture of peace: Empowering and transforming humanity*. I spoke about the great responsibility that we, as parliamentarians, had in building the culture of peace.

Later that week, I attended several meetings in Washington DC. I would like to express my gratitude to Senator Susan Kihika, President of the IPU Forum of Women Parliamentarians, who also joined me in these meetings and events.

On 19 September, I participated, along with Ms. Sunna Ævarsdóttir of Iceland (member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), and Senator Susan Kihika, in a **breakfast meeting on violence against women politicians**. The event was co-organized by the IPU New York office and the US-based League of Women Voters. Several US congresswomen spoke at the event, which



Sixth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. © IPU Flickr



Meetings in Washington D.C.

had congressional sponsorship from House representatives **Ms. Jackie Speier (Democrat, California)**, **Mr. Dan Kildee (Democrat, Michigan)** and **Ms. Debbie Lesko (Republican, Arizona)**. Ms. Speier and Ms. Lesko both chair their parties' women's caucuses. Mr. Kildee is a friend of the IPU. Representative **Barbara Lee (Democrat, California)**, an adviser to the IPU Advisory Group on Health, made opening remarks. Representatives **Bonnie Watson Coleman (Democrat, New Jersey)** and **Debbie Lesko** both spoke at the meeting, which was well attended by the staff of several US parliamentarians and many representatives of the League of Women Voters from its state chapters. The meeting was moderated by Reuters correspondent **Ms. Ginger Gibson**.

Also on 19 September, the **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission** and the **House Democracy Partnership** jointly hosted a high-level briefing on the IPU's **Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians**. Co-Chairs of both organizations, Representatives **Jim McGovern (Democrat, Massachusetts)** and **Mr. David Price (Democrat, North Carolina)** opened the meeting. **Senator Susan Kihika** read a statement from the Committee's Vice-President, Venezuelan MP **Ms. Delsa Solórzano**, who was unable to attend in person. There were presentations by Turkish MP **Mr. Hışyar Ozsoy** and **Mr. Vicente de Lima**, brother of detained Philippine Senator **Ms. Leila de Lima**. Reuters international correspondent **Ms. Mary Milliken** moderated the rich discussion which followed.

Our subsequent meetings allowed us to share information about the IPU and look for possible colleagues in the United States who would be interested in working with us. We met with **Senators Todd Young (Republican, Indiana)**, **Bill Cassidy (Republican, Louisiana)** and **Ben Cardin (Democrat, Maryland)**, and **Representatives Jackie Speier**, **Francis Rooney (Republican, Florida)**, **Donna Shalala (Democrat, Florida)**, and **Liz Cheney (Republican, Wyoming)**.

In Washington DC, I was invited by the Mexico Institute of the Wilson Center to attend a breakfast meeting to discuss multilateralism and cooperation. We live in an era in which some countries violate international conventions and withdraw from multilateral agreements to satisfy their interests, which they also impose on others through intimidation. Multilateral cooperation is needed

to keep global peace and development moving ahead. An inclusive multilateralism is essential to face global challenges, and to achieve progress in the maintenance of peace and security, the protection of human rights, and the promotion and achievement of the SDGs.

The 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly opened on 17 September in New York. I had the honour of being invited as a panellist to the event, ***Intergenerational town hall: young leaders engage with world leaders***, part of the United Nations Youth Climate Summit, which was held on 21 September. The town hall was chaired by prominent high-level leaders of the United Nations, governments and civil society. The event was a platform for young leaders driving climate action to showcase their solutions at the United Nations, and to meaningfully engage with decisionmakers on the defining issue of our time.

On 22 September, Senator Susan Kihika and I were invited to attend **the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Accountability Breakfast. The United Nations high-level meeting on universal health coverage, *Moving together for a healthier world***, was held the following day. The IPU was well represented at the meeting. The meeting was a clarion call for greater accountability towards women, children and adolescents as being central to achieving universal health coverage and the SDGs. Through interactive demonstrations and panellists, discussions reviewed progress to date, and the tools and guidance needed for strengthening accountability.

I took part in the **high-level meeting on universal health coverage as part of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**. During my intervention, I pointed out the importance of ensuring true universal access to health as an essential human right. I explained the IPU's work and added that we had drafted a resolution on universal access to health that had been adopted by parliaments across the entire world.

The challenge lay in achieving consensus and in the implementation of all recommendations. Our most important goal was to ensure that all people and all children had free access to health care and enjoyed the human right to health.

On 24 September, Senator Susan Kihika and I participated in **the RISE sexual violence survivor town hall**. Participants were invited to reflect through true testimonies on the importance of taking action to stop sexual violence.

I also attended **the opening of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**, followed by a lunch hosted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to which all heads of delegation were invited. This was an opportunity for an exchange of ideas on collaborative work with United Nations agencies and national governments.

Later, I went to **the reception hosted by the European Union delegation**, where I had the honour of meeting **the Prime Minister of Belgium and the then President-elect of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel**. We discussed the need to review the issue of sanctions on parliamentarians that

prevented us from properly representing the people through parliamentary diplomacy. It also slowed down the development of relations with European Union countries in terms of parliamentary diplomacy. I therefore asked him if he might be able to receive an IPU delegation to discuss this topic.

On 25 September, Senator Susan Kihika and I had a bilateral meeting with the **President of Turkey, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan.** We talked about the challenges that Turkey and Central America were facing when it came to helping and providing opportunities to refugees and immigrants.

Also, during the **Leaders Dialogues of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held under the auspices of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,** I had the opportunity to intervene in **Leaders Dialogue 4, Localizing the SDGs.** The focus was on the key issues and recommendations world leaders should be working on, and in which they should be investing their efforts as we approach the implementation decade of the 2030 Agenda. Local and regional governments needed to undertake actions to raise awareness of the Agenda. We need to commit to generating growth and employment through local development and fiscal strategies. Also, it is essential to promote the inclusion of women and youth, and work actively on coordinating partnerships with all relevant stakeholders.

That day, we organized **a lunch with MPs who attended the opening of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.** Senator Susan Kihika and I later participated in the event, ***Champions for generation equality – women leaders of the world,*** hosted by UN Women and the Council of Women World Leaders. I spoke about the IPU Forum of Women Parliamentarians, our projects for capacitybuilding, and the urgent need to have gender quotas to achieve true social representation in our democracies. Furthermore, we discussed the events we would organize with UN Women for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration. Finally, I pointed out my concern about gender violence and explained the work the IPU was doing in this regard.



[IPU Forum for Women Parliamentarians.](#)

On 26 September, I had the honour of meeting **with the President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande.** We both believe in

multilateralism and in education as the most powerful tool that we must use to change this planet.

I had a meeting with **Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism,** and with **Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva.** The following day, I had a working meeting with **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women** to discuss topics related to the IPU's work on women's representation.

Since I was at the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. José Carlos Mahía, an MP from Uruguay, participated on behalf of the IPU Presidency at **the Regional Meeting on Food and Nutrition Security in Latin America and the Caribbean,** which took place in Montevideo, Uruguay from 30 September to 2 October 2019.



[Investiture Ceremony of the Captains Regent of San Marino.](#)

I had the opportunity of visiting San Marino, where I took part in the Investiture Ceremony of the Captains Regent, Ms. Mariella Mularoni and Mr. Luca Boschi. As a keynote speaker, I highlighted the importance of parliamentarism and the participation of citizens in political processes. I am very grateful to San Marino for bestowing upon me the great distinction of The Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of Saint Agatha.

The final year of the Presidency: From October 2019 to March 2020

I would have liked to continue with the dynamism and intense commitment that I have always wanted to bring to my tenure as President of the IPU. But we all know that this has become impossible since the end of February due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As time and conditions allowed, I was able to achieve the following since our last Assembly in Serbia: visit 17 countries; participate in regional parliamentary meetings with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in France; support the emergence of a new parliamentary network to combat hunger as part of a south-south cooperation scheme promoted by Morocco; strengthen parliamentary commitment to ending corruption by holding a conference in Qatar on the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC); back the work of Asian Parliamentary Assembly MPs' meeting in Turkey by generating better proposals for parliamentary cooperation and dialogue; and, assist in designing better legal frameworks that promotes green energy development in the United Arab Emirates.

Last year I undertook regional visits to the Middle East and countries of the Arab Peninsula and this semester I was able to complete my work in Africa. I appreciate the enormous generosity and hospitality of the respective countries, parliaments, as well as the Speakers with whom I met. I also value the engaging meetings I attended, the special parliamentary sessions dedicated to the IPU, and the stimulating conversations I had with Heads of State.

An essential part of my work has been **to bring the IPU closer to the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General, and the United Nations agencies with which I am in constant contact.** I believe that we have to move closer together by linking the parliamentarians who serve on IPU standing committees and working groups with the United Nations agencies that deal with the same issues. Operational coordination through the Secretariat is certainly important, but parliamentarians cannot continue to stand on the sidelines of United Nations decision-making and projects. Inclusion has been a priority during my tenure.

From October 2019 to March 2020, I have participated in different events with the United Nations, including **the opening of the Conference for Central Europe, Prevention of radicalization to terrorism: Regional policy responses and risk mitigation**, which was organized in Budapest by the Government of Hungary in conjunction with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT); the **2020 Annual Parliamentary Hearing, organized at UN Headquarters in New York by the IPU and the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande**; and **the parliamentary meeting, Securing our common future: An agenda for disarmament, designed for parliamentarians**, parliamentary organizations and United Nations delegations to discuss

how parliamentarians can advance the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament. I also launched the map, **Women in Politics: 2020**, at a joint virtual event with **UN Women Executive Director, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.**

In addition, I am a member of **the United Nations High-Level Steering Group for the Every Woman, Every Child movement**, and of **the Political Advisory Panel for the Universal Health Coverage movement, UHC2030.**

I have played a very active role in counter-terrorism, by working with UNOCT and our High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. I congratulate the Group for its close coordination with UNOCT in promoting dialogue, face-to-face meetings, exchanges, proposals, and events. In this regard, it proved crucial to include the High-Level Advisory Group, their members, and all those who have accompanied us in the delegations for each and every one of the regional forums.

We worked with members of the Preparatory Committee and the IPU Secretariat on plans for the **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.**

We cannot forget one of the most important responsibilities of the IPU, which is to defend the human rights of parliamentarians. Our colleagues at the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and the members of the Secretariat team who supports them, are all working tirelessly in dealing with the ever increasing number of complaints. **Dear colleagues, we cannot take democracy for granted while parliamentarians are being harassed, while military forces enter congressional sessions to pressure members into voting in a particular way, and while parliamentarians' lives are threatened with death for expressing their opinion.** If we want to fulfil our mandate which requires us being proactive in defending democracy, we cannot forget that parliaments are its base and foundation. Without them, democracy will falter.

I am the second woman to preside over the IPU. My focus has been looking after women's empowerment, and that has been a key component of my agenda. **That is why we worked with the Executive Director of UN Women to launch the map, Women in Politics: 2020.** The map gives a full picture of where the world stands in terms of women's representation. Women's voices must be heard at the highest levels of decision-making, and leaders should support women to be part of those processes. On **International Women's Day**, I released **a joint statement with the President of the European Parliament, Mr. David Sassoli**, reaffirming the commitment to redouble our efforts towards ensuring that every girl and every woman can live free from violence and discrimination.



141st IPU Assembly. © IPU Flickr

The 141st IPU Assembly brought together more than 2,000 delegates from 150 countries, including 75 Speakers of parliament. We dedicated our work to international law, and addressed very important issues. As parliamentarians, we must build bridges and foster peace so as to promote tolerance, love and respect. Hate narratives, xenophobia and discrimination have no place in the twenty-first century.

I want to thank the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Ms. Maja Gojković, for her hospitality and, above all, her great commitment and dedication to organizing the Assembly.

In the 141st IPU Assembly, we prioritized an agenda that is relevant for citizens: translating global agreements into national realities. In the Declaration adopted in Belgrade, we committed to upholding international law and regional cooperation. A Resolution calling for parliaments to take all legal and policy measures to achieve Universal Health Care by 2030 was adopted, because we were convinced of the need to ensure the rights of people to healthcare to the fullest extent. The agenda also included other relevant items, such as the fight against terrorism and extremism; climate change; the digital economy, jobs, and decent wages; human rights; full inclusion for real democracy, gender and youth quotas; combatting and preventing money laundering; and in the framework of #NotInMyParliament, policies against harassment and sexism in parliaments.

My work in Serbia included: holding bilateral meetings to better understand the needs of each country, parliament and fellow legislators; participating in a workshop on implementing national gender and youth quota laws; working with the Advisory Group on Health and the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights towards a resolution on universal health coverage; celebrating the IPU's 130th anniversary; and engaging with Speakers of parliament on issues such as security, human rights, development and inclusion.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also took place in October. I participated in the Assembly's **European**



Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Ms. Maja Gojković.



European Conference of Presidents of Parliament.



141st Assembly in Belgrade, Serbia.

Conference of Presidents of Parliament. This was crucial to encouraging parliamentarians to translate global commitments into local solutions, so as to help achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I would like to thank the President of PACE, **Ms. Liliane Maury Pasquier, for inviting me, and for all the joint work that we have carried out for the benefit of women and girls.**

The second Sustainable Development Goal is ambitiously overwhelming: zero hunger. Morocco took a south- south cooperation lead on food sufficiency by calling all African, Latin American and Arab regional parliaments to hold a broad dialogue in order to exchange best practices and national policies.

In my address, **I highlighted the urgency of turning words and speeches into concrete actions.** It is our obligation to prepare and approve budgets that prioritize the millions of people who are suffering or even starving. We have to act now. Guaranteeing the right to food is a responsibility that we cannot allow ourselves to overlook. For the leadership that they have shown in uniting regions to work together, I extend my appreciation to the **President of the House of Representatives of Morocco, Mr. Habib El Malki, and that of the Chamber of Counsellors, Mr. Hakim Benchamach.**

On 4 November, I was delighted to **co-chair the Second edition of the G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) with the President of the House of Councillors of the National Diet of Japan, Ms. Akiko Santo.** The global economy poses important challenges: technological change, inclusion, and an



International Seminar on "Parliaments and Food Security Challenges"

urgent need for better wealth distribution, jobs, wages, as well as gender equality.

Innovation has been among the principles of my IPU presidency. **I believe that the IPU needs to strengthen its economic agenda,** because our peoples are demanding better living conditions, jobs, wages and benefits, a decent retirement, and urgent action to stop climate change.

We have **held P20 sessions (parliamentary meetings run in parallel with G20 events)** for the last two years. Why is the P20 mechanism important?

Governments meet within the G20 framework to discuss and agree on programmes and public policies that affect people's lives.



Sixth G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20).

These debates and agreements require transparency and scrutiny. Above all, good proposals need implementation. This usually occurs through the legislative bodies that translate proposals into laws and approve budgets.

During my visit to the European Parliament, I met its President, Mr. David Sassoli, had a hearing, and held very positive talks with the Parliament's committees on foreign affairs (AFET), women's rights and gender equality (FEMM), and international trade (INTA).

Cooperation between the IPU and the European Parliament is essential to defending multilateralism, promoting equality between women and men, and strengthening democratic capacity around the world. One result of the visit was that **Mr. Sassoli and I issued a joint statement for International Women's Day (8 March 2020)**. As Presidents of our respective organizations, we reaffirmed our commitment to taking urgent action towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.



President of the European Parliament, Mr. David Sassoli.

Later in November, I spoke at the **Opening of the Conference for Central Europe, Prevention of radicalization to terrorism: Regional policy responses and risk mitigation**, which was organized by the Government of Hungary together with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

What leads hundreds of young people to leave their countries to join terrorist groups? What does that say about our own shortcomings when young people are pushed towards radicalization and choose a path of hatred and death? In my message, **I stressed that terrorism cannot be tied down to any particular religion, nationality, ethnic group, or political preference.**

Rather, it only epitomizes hatred, fear, and death. Political responsibility is therefore essential to preventing radicalization.

I had the honour of speaking at the **African Regional Parliamentary Conference, Comprehensive responses to refugee situations: Effective parliamentary approaches**, in Midrand, South Africa. Refugee protection is at the core of the IPU's work and is very close to my heart.

More than 70 million people are currently displaced around the world due to conflict and natural disasters, and numbers

have continued to rise over the years. I have stated that three components of the role of parliamentarians were crucial to stopping this rise. First, legislation and legislative reform are some of the primary ways of responding to refugees' needs, as well as protecting both those who are fleeing and host communities. These frameworks must be inclusive and geared towards the needs of the most vulnerable. Second, budgets must provide sufficient funding to translate policy and legislative objectives into reality. Third, we have the power to hold our governments accountable for the commitments they make.



International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Accelerating the promise, in Nairobi, Kenya.

After that meeting, I attended the **International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Accelerating the promise, in Nairobi, Kenya.**

The aim of last year's Conference was to create awareness on how sexual and reproductive health and rights are an essential element of universal health coverage. Those rights must be guaranteed in a comprehensive, life-course approach in order to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I participated in the panel discussion on opportunities and challenges as we move towards implementing the essential sexual and reproductive health package through a comprehensive life-course approach. **We discussed how we could overcome political controversies and promote development based on the evidence of what is needed and what women want.**

The Conference gave me an opportunity to present my analysis of the IPU Resolution on achieving UHC by 2030 which was adopted at our Belgrade Assembly. **I explained how the resolution could be used to leverage stronger national commitments and accountability for sexual and reproductive health and rights as part of universal health coverage.**

Afterwards, **the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament took place.** As IPU President, I am responsible for leading the Committee's work and reinforcing the message that we should make every possible effort to put people at the centre of our decisions and dedicate our endeavours to delivering prompt solutions. Transforming our communities and working as a team is the only way to build a better planet.



Second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

As part of my commitment to fighting global corruption, I also had the opportunity to participate in the **Seventh Global Conference of Parliamentarians Against Corruption in Doha, Qatar**. While we must urgently devise better laws and institutions, it is also essential for us to bear in mind that corruption is a problem of integrity and trust.

The world has some 46,000 parliamentarians. We have the power to change laws and budgets. We must be the generation which takes responsibility for ending corruption once and for all.

During my visit, I spoke to the Vice Emir of Qatar together with Mr. Ahmed Bin Abdallah Bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud, President of the Shura Council and Speakers of Parliament. I would to recognize Speaker Al Mahmoud's efforts in presiding over GOPAC, and to thank the Qatari people for their generous hospitality.

In December, I took part in a **parliamentary meeting which was held during the 25^a United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25), in Madrid, Spain**. I am grateful to the **Royal Courts, the President of the Congress of Deputies, Ms. Meritxell Batet, and the President of the Spanish Senate, Ms. María Llop** for organizing this meeting with the IPU.

One of the most important requests from my colleagues is that the IPU should be more actively engaged in developing capacity-building programmes. Therefore, the IPU must prioritize accordingly. We must continue to learn, exchange experiences in order to better ourselves and acquire the best tools to perform our duties as parliamentarians. In that spirit, the programmes innovated during my Presidency included **the IPU's first Executive Education Parliamentary Leadership seminar. Mexico took the initiative with the School of Government and Public Transformation of the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education**. The leadership seminar was our first effort in designing a more specialized curriculum by teaching the values, knowledge and tools needed to improve results in our countries.



Asian Parliamentary Assembly.



Leadership Seminar for Parliamentarians, Mexico City.



Parliamentary meeting on the occasion of COP 25, Madrid, Spain.

Also in December, **the Asian Parliamentary Assembly met for its 12th Plenary Session in Antalya, Turkey**, to discuss the role of multilateral cooperation within Asian parliaments.

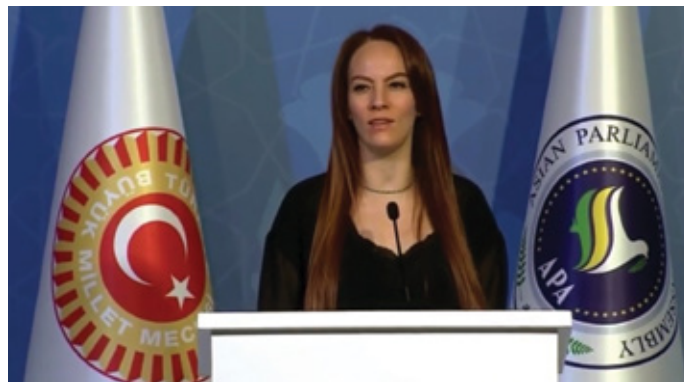
The IPU was founded 130 years ago as the first multilateral political organization. It was dedicated to promoting democracy and human rights through parliamentary diplomacy. But allow me to take a step back and reflect on: **why is multilateralism the subject of so much discussion?**

Multilateral organizations provide the best-suited space for plural dialogue and shared solutions. Tragically, current events have shown that humanity has forgotten the hard-learned lessons from the twentieth century: hate breeds war, and discrimination breeds death.

Some voices are promoting unilateralism and hate narratives. However, **we, as parliamentarians** must always be mindful of our duty to **defend multilateralism as much as possible**. This can be achieved by translating international commitments into national realities and offering our people solutions drawn from the best experiences elsewhere in the world.

While in Turkey, I also discussed multilateralism with the **Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Şentop**, and I would like to thank him for inviting me to participate in this important event.

Upon entering the new year, **my first visit as IPU President was to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to attend the IRENA 2020 Legislators Forum on 10 January**. As a panellist, I addressed the important role of legislators in scaling up energy



Asian Parliamentary Assembly, 12th Plenary Session: *The role of multilateral cooperation among Asian parliaments.*

transformation. The entire day was dedicated to discussing and developing proposals.

I also met with the President of the UAE Federal National Council, Mr. Saqr Ghobash, and participating members of the IPU delegation. We agreed to work together in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, and on sustainability and gender equality.

Empowering young people is among the IPU's main strategic objectives. This can be achieved by ensuring that young women and men hold representative positions. My next visit was **to Djibouti**, and I must say that they know a great deal about including young people: **32 per cent of MPs are under 45!**

I would like to thank **the Prime Minister of Djibouti, Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed**, and the Speaker of the



IRENA 2020 Legislators Forum, Abu Dhabi, UAE.



Prime Minister of Djibouti,
Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed.

National Assembly, Mr. Mohamed Ali Houmed, for their warm welcome and for the productive meetings we held. The IPU works closely with the National Assembly of Djibouti on human rights, youth, and gender equality.

I also wish to say that I welcome the very positive progress that Djibouti has achieved on gender equality and tackling violence against women and girls.

Following up on my commitment to undertake further visits to Africa, I travelled to Seychelles. Despite their small parliament, these beautiful islands have achieved effective participation. This includes both a Youth Assembly and among the highest proportions of women holding ministerial portfolios in Africa. Those are crucial factors to achieving a truly inclusive democracy.

Also during that visit, I met with the **Speaker, Mr. Nicholas Prea**, and fellow parliamentarians. I also met the **President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure**, and the **Vice-President, Mr. Vincent Meriton**.



President of Seychelles, Mr. Danny Faure.

We discussed the importance of defending multilateralism as a space for dialogue where all countries can build solutions to common problems, especially climate change. **The IPU's role and responsibility is crucial, it being the only global organization where the people's representatives of 179 nations meet.**

In my address to the National Assembly of Seychelles, I emphasized the urgent need to defend democracy and human rights, to protect people in each and every one of our decisions, and to include women and youth in order to achieve truly representative parliaments.



Speaker Nicholas Prea and MPs of Seychelles.

Parliamentarians and legislative institutions have both the obligation and duty to represent their citizens. Nonetheless, people's trust in their representatives has waned. Democracies appear to be weakening in the face of populism and authoritarianism, and parliaments can seem detached and unable to meet people's needs. This is why providing opportunities for inclusion becomes essential to enabling people to regain faith in their representatives and to effectively addressing their needs.

On my visit to Uganda, I attended part of **Parliament Week**, a very thought-provoking event organized by the Ugandan legislature. **By opening its doors to the public, the Parliament generated transparent and informative material about its responsibilities and what it delivers.** Hundreds of citizens – mainly young people – role-played as parliamentarians in a one-day exercise. This included a vote to elect ministers and a Speaker, and another vote to adopt the day's resolutions on how to strengthen democracy in Uganda.

I welcomed my meeting with the **President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni**. He not only works closely with Parliament, but he is also very well informed about the Ugandan delegation's work with the IPU.

I would like to thank: the **Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, Ms. Rebecca Kadaga**, for her invitation; the parliamentarian, **Ms. Esther Anyakun**, for her commitment to the IPU Executive Committee and her invaluable support to women; and **Ms. Mourine Osuru**, who was our global leader of young parliamentarians, and an active advocate for inclusion.



President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni; Speaker of Parliament, Ms. Rebecca Kadaga; MP, Ms. Esther Anyakun.

I feel very privileged to note that **my next engagement was in Burkina Faso at the inauguration of the 15th conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.**



Inauguration of the 15th conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.

I had the opportunity to address the parliamentarians in attendance, and to highlight my solidarity with the Palestinian people. **Terrorism knows no religion, and any attempt to impose borders cannot produce solutions.** As a Catholic invited to an Islamic conference, I appreciated the great opportunity to learn more about a religion that speaks of love and fraternity.

I had the honour of visiting Namibia and learning about its culture, history and parliamentary tradition. While there, I had very engaging discussions during my official meeting with the **Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Peter Katjavivi**, and the **Chairperson to the National Council, Mr. Bernard Songa Silbalatani**.



President of Namibia, Mr. Hage Geingob.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the **President of Namibia, Mr. Hage Geingob**, and with **Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, former President of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, and our Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.**

I wish to commend the Namibian delegation to the IPU for its great work and for our shared achievements. In presiding the over IPU and the United Nations General Assembly, Namibia contributed a great deal to bringing the IPU closer to the United Nations.

My working visit to Africa was followed by another major event: **the annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations in New York city.** It was organized by the IPU and the **President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande.**

At the Opening Session, I discussed Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education). I noted that international dialogue and cooperation are essential, since problems in education transcend borders or nationalities. **Education should not be the preserve of a privileged few. That is why it is a high priority to ensure that everyone across the world is able to exercise their human right to education.** Achieving that vision will requires high-quality teaching, trained and well-paid teachers, decent and safe infrastructure, and curricula that promote gender equality and environmental responsibility and also help students to become better citizens, who are committed to democracy and human rights.



The President of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande.

During my stay in New York, I met with a range of people, including **Professor Jeffrey Sachs**, an American economist, academic, public policy analyst, and former director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. We discussed ways to connect parliaments digitally, and to put in place training and monitoring mechanisms for projects designed to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

I had the opportunity to visit **UN Women**, and to meet with its **Executive Director, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**. We discussed the most effective ways of achieving generational equality and reviewed the statistics underpinning the Women in Politics map, on which our organizations work together.

As it is important to remain in close contact with IPU delegates, I also held meetings with many IPU delegations, including those from Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Yemen.

On the last day of the **Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations**, I gave my closing remarks jointly with the **President of the General Assembly, Mr. Muhammad-Bande**. I also gave a **short presentation at an IPU reception** for all delegates and speakers who attended the Hearing. That was a great honour.

The Annual Hearing is especially important, because it enables parliamentarians from around the world to share best practices from their respective countries. This year, the debate centred on how to improve access to education and lifelong learning for citizens of all ages, especially women, girls and marginalized people.

The day after the UN Hearing, I stayed in New York **for a parliamentary meeting, Securing our common future: An agenda for disarmament**. This was a forum for parliamentarians, parliamentary organizations, and UN delegations to discuss the United Nations Secretary-General's disarmament agenda and how parliamentarians can advance it in cooperation with governments, the United Nations and civil society.

I delivered welcoming remarks and contributed to the main discussions as a panellist. We reviewed the key elements of the United Nations Secretary-General's agenda for disarmament, reflected on current conflicts and arms races, and took stock of disarmament agreements and negotiations.



Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, 2020.

The IPU supports parliaments throughout the world with knowledge tools based on technical and scientific research to help MPs take evidence-based decisions. The publications we develop with our partners provide parliamentarians with practical guidance on legal instruments, policy responses and specific actions that can effectively tackle health challenges.

At this point, the effects of COVID-19 began to spread. But meetings started to carry on in a virtual format, because even then we were mindful of the fact that our work could not stop.

The pandemic is a global challenge which has spared virtually no country in the world. States are making extensive efforts to provide health services and cover the needs of their citizenry in order to mitigate the impact of the virus. Even so, there is no way to predict how this health emergency will evolve in the coming months. As we consider everyone's health and wellbeing a priority, the events scheduled for March and April were cancelled.

We have must devise virtual solutions to everything we do. I must say that we have learned an important lesson as a result. This year, technology will play an important role. As parliamentarians, we must promote better distance learning and ensure equitable access to it.

The IPU's leadership on women's, children's and adolescents' health has long been recognized by international partners. As a member of the **High-Level Steering Group for Every Woman, Every Child (EWEC)**, I attended a virtual meeting of the Group in March.

The Steering Group discussed opportunities of the EWEC agenda and the threats it faces. We also discussed how to meet funding shortfalls and establish a sustained and coherent global advocacy and investment plan so as to end the preventable deaths of mothers, children, and adolescents, and ensure their health and well-being.

On 18 March, I jointly launched the map, ***Women in Politics: 2020***, at a virtual event jointly with the **Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**.

The map gives a full picture of where the world stands in terms of women in politics. Countries are ranked according to the percentage of women in parliament and in ministerial positions. The map sets out where women are represented at the highest levels in decision-making, both in parliament and government. It also lists the main ministerial portfolios held by women. In 2020, the overall percentage of women in parliaments still stands at 24.9. We must therefore aim at faster progress towards gender equality and the implementation of gender quotas. Eight out of the ten countries with the highest percentage of women in parliament have some form of affirmative action.

At the IPU, we have been supporting countries that exhibit the political will to strive for gender balance. Our support has included leading activities and spreading knowledge in order to develop an understanding within the political establishment, civil society and the general public about the importance of women's participation in politics.

On 24 March, I joined **the first virtual meeting of the political advisory panel to the universal health coverage movement, UHC2030. Health is a precondition for and an outcome of sustainable development.** Even so, many are still being denied enjoyment of the right to health. At least half the world's population remains without full access to essential health services. For example, we must not forget that as we speak, some 290,000 women die every year from pregnancy and delivery complications, and that vast inequalities persist all around the world. Maternal mortality is nearly fifty times higher for women in sub-Saharan Africa than in high-income countries.

In the face of these challenges, parliaments have a key role to play as agents of change for the health and well-being of their populations. We are responsible for developing a comprehensive framework to promote health and human rights. But we must also ensure that these rights are converted into equitable access to health and well-being for all sectors of society.



Virtual launch of the map, *Women in Politics: 2020*, with Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The map was jointly created by the IPU and UN Women.

The last months of the Presidency: March 2020 to October 2020

As the pandemic has engulfed most of the world, maintaining an active Presidency has posed unique challenges, namely those relating to health restrictions which have severely restricted travel and in-person meetings and events. The fact of the matter is that there is no substitute to in-person interaction; the world will not pause and neither will the problems that need to be addressed cease to exist.

Despite the challenges relating to the current circumstances, **this Presidency has still managed to ensure participation in several meetings, events, and initiatives, aided by the technological tools which facilitate remote communication.** Needless to say, much of the agenda has revolved around COVID-19 related issues, as the global community mobilizes to find ways to address the multiple problems posed by the pandemic. It is encouraging to note that many individuals and organizations are working tirelessly to overcome this unprecedented challenge.

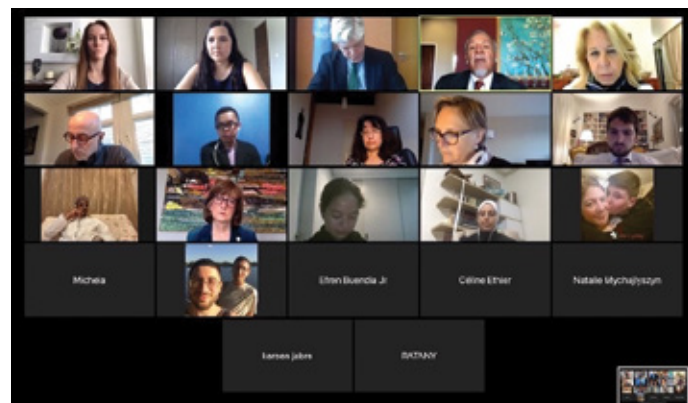
On March, I participated in the **first group call for the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Movement Political Advisory Panel**, during which the Terms of Reference were defined. I also underlined the key role of parliaments in making UHC a reality in their respective countries. Health has always been a priority for the IPU, and this is also reflected in a resolution adopted during the 141st IPU Assembly, calling on parliaments to work towards UHC by 2030.

Regrettably, not only does COVID-19 impact people's health – but it has been proven to impact our democracies. In that regard, on 16 April, I joined Mr. Alan Stoga, Chairman of the Tällberg Foundation and Ms. Paula DiPerna, strategic environmental advisor, in a **conversation about the future of democracy in the context of COVID-19**. As parliamentarians, it is important for us to reflect on our responsibility to countervail any government action which uses the health crisis as an opportunity to institutionalize undemocratic practices. I am grateful to Mr. Stoga for inviting me to join this insightful discussion.

In April, I **issued joint a statement** with Mr. José Ignacio Echániz, President of the IPU Committee on Peace and International Security and Mr. Reinhold Lopatka, President of the IPU HLAG on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, **backing the UN Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire amidst the ongoing pandemic.**

During April, we were scheduled to meet in Geneva for the 142nd IPU Assembly, but (as it also happened with all major multilateral meetings) we were forced to postpone it due to the pandemic. On that occasion, I issued a **Presidential Statement** reflecting on that development. I echoed the words of the United Nations Secretary General: "This is the time for solidarity, not exclusion," and I also emphasized that we must stand together to offer global responses to global challenges.

I joined in the **Women Leaders Roundtable on COVID-19 and the future**, convened by **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women**, and **Ms. Gabriela Ramos, OECD Chief of Staff**.



[International Day of Multilateralism.](#)

For the **International Day of Multilateralism**, the IPU convened a virtual panel with **Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations**; **Mr. Juan Carlos Romero, President of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs**; **Mr. Mladen Grujić, Serbian MP and member of the IPU Executive Committee**. The panel moderator was Ms. Paddy Torsney, Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations. **We cannot allow multilateralism to become another casualty of the pandemic, precisely at a time when it is needed the most.** I welcome opportunities such as this one to reflect on our role as parliamentarians in upholding multilateralism.

On that same day, I also participated in a **Virtual Parliamentary Briefing on Pandemics with a Special Focus on Covid-19** hosted by the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – around 255 participants from over 70 countries followed the proceedings. I would like to



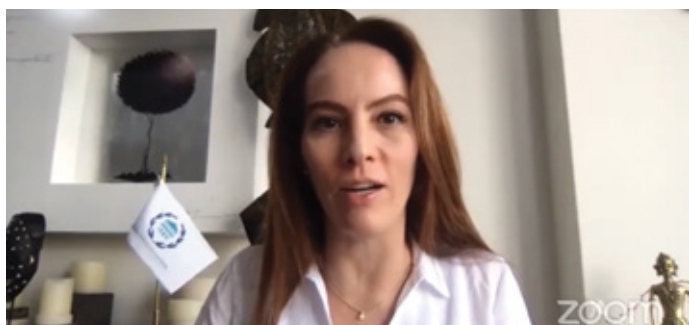
[Virtual Parliamentary Briefing on Pandemics \(From the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund\).](#)

thank **Mr. Liam Byrne, Chair of the Parliamentary Network**, for the invitation.

For this year's Victory in Europe Day, I issued a **Presidential Statement in May**. I used that opportunity to reflect on the fact that **the IPU was founded precisely to prevent major loss of life through war, of which the Second World War remains a tragic example**. Even with the hard-learned lessons emerging from that conflict, hate speeches and nationalism still hold sway. If a repeat of the Second World War is to be avoided, we must show unity and faith in dialogue.

During May, I also presided over **meetings of the Preparatory Committee and the Drafting Committee for the 5WCSP Declaration**. During those meetings, we prepared a programme for the Conference, worked on drafting the Declaration, and decided on the panellists for the Conference's events. Although our plans were adversely affected by uncertainties of the pandemic, we still needed to find ways to forge forward, including in a virtual format. Our Organization must be a model of resilience for the rest of the global community and must devise global responses, parliamentary solutions and multilateral dialogue.

I took part in the **"Women's Leadership in the COVID-19 Response to Protect Every Woman Every Child" virtual roundtable**, hosted by **Ms. Helen Clark, PMNCH Board Chair, and Ms. Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia**. This high-level meeting was organized by Every Woman Every Child (EWEC), together with the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and Women Deliver.



Delivering remarks during Women's Leadership in the COVID-19 Response to Protect Every Woman Every Child roundtable (Taken from EWEC's YouTube Account)

The roundtable was organized for the purpose of bringing together women leaders to reflect on the gender-specific impacts that the pandemic is having on women and girls worldwide. Some of the other participants included PMNCH Board Chair Ms. Michelle Bachelet, current PMNCH Private Sector Board Member Ms. Mary-Ann Etiebet of Merck for Mothers, PMNCH NGO alternate Ms. Katja Iversen of Women Deliver, Ms. Awa Marie Coll-Seck, Minister of State to the President of the Republic of Senegal, Ms. Amy Pollack for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, and Ms. Gerda Verburg, of Scaling Up Nutrition.

In this context, I underlined the need to work for universal health systems. Parliaments must allocate and adjust their budgets accordingly, while prioritizing the needs of women and girls.

On 2 June, I **presided over a virtual meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**, an event which we had been planning and putting a great deal of effort into since February 2019. At the time when we began our preparations for the Conference, there was no way of telling that the world would now be plunged into the circumstances it is now facing, and that it would be necessary to drastically alter the format of the Conference. I would like to commend the Preparatory Committee members for their dedication to these efforts. **We managed to build a consensus on holding the Conference in a virtual format.**

It is important to recall as well that this is the first Preparatory Committee to be elected democratically, in line with gender parity. Previously, committee members were only chosen by the IPU President with the agreement of the Secretariat.

The following day, 3 June, I attended **the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Movement Political Advisory Panel's second virtual meeting**. We discussed ways to advocate for the key commitments of the UHC political declaration, as well as how to best mobilize our networks in favour of the UHC2030 agenda.

Continued participation in this initiative – which was already of relevance since the high-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World at the United Nations General Assembly of 2019 – has only become more pertinent and necessary. **The pandemic cannot be addressed if healthcare is made available only to the chosen few and not to the general public.** In this regard, I would like to thank the UHC Secretariat for their willingness to involve us and seek our participation and contribution.

The National Assembly of Ecuador and GRULAC hosted a **Dialogue between Presidents of the Legislative Powers in the Americas**, as both an attendant and contributor. This virtual meeting was aimed at enabling e-parliaments to exchange ideas and best practices on how to maintain parliamentary work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in regard to the technical measures that lawmakers are taking in order to carry on with their duties, as well as any obstacles they are facing in preserving their legislative, representative, and checks-and-balances capacities.

Parliaments are vital to democratic life. This means that parliamentary work cannot be suspended. Instead, parliaments must devise ways to perform their duties remotely and adapt their procedural frameworks accordingly. There is no room for absence and inaction in this regard. If parliaments cease to function, little can be achieved in terms of government oversight. In times of crisis, this cannot be allowed to happen. I would like to thank **Mr. César Litardo, President of the National Assembly of Ecuador; Mr. Blas Llano, President of IPU's GRULAC; and Mr. Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States** for giving me the opportunity to take part in this timely discussion.



Opening remarks at the *Diálogo Virtual entre Presidentes de los Poderes Legislativos de Latinoamérica*. (Taken from the Senate of Paraguay's YouTube channel)

Now of all times, the IPU should remain active in its supporting role to parliamentarians worldwide. Along with the **Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Parliamentarians for the Global Goals (PfGG)**, we sought to launch a **series of Webinars for Parliamentarians and COVID-19**. We held our first such webinar on 9 June with a focus on achieving an economic recovery in line with the fulfilment of the SDGs.

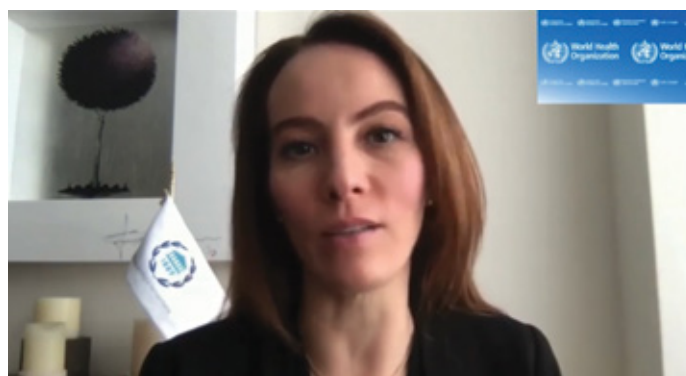
We intended these webinars to be discussion-oriented, affording parliamentarians with the perspective of experts to better inform their decision-making in the context of the pandemic. Around 300 parliamentarians from around the world joined us. I am grateful to **Ms. Kirsten Brosbøl, founder of Parliamentarians for the Global Goals**, as well as **Dr. Jeffrey Sachs and Ms. Lauren Barredo from SDSN**, for affording me the opportunity to work together for my fellow parliamentarians. I would also like thank **Dr. Yuning Gao, Dr. Jayati Ghosh, and Dr. Martin Muhleisen** for participating in our first webinar and for their insightful contributions.

Later on that day, I was requested to **address the House of Commons of Canada's Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**. As President of the IPU, the Standing Committee wished to hear the IPU's views on adapting COVID-19-related public health measures as parliaments. **This was a further effort to provide the needed expertise and technical advice to parliaments in order to help them continue functioning amidst the current global health crisis.** I am grateful to the Standing Committee for the courtesy and for including our Organization in their deliberations.

In concluding that busy week, I joined **Dr. Natalia Kanem (Executive Director of UNFPA and host of the EWEC Secretariat)**, **Ms. Mary-Ann Etiebet (Lead Merck for Mothers)**, **Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake (United Nations Secretary-General Envoy**

on Youth) in the **World Health Organization's COVID-19 press briefing**. **Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Director-General of the World Health Organization**, was present.

This was a follow-up to the virtual roundtable organized by EWEC in May, as the press briefing focused on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health. I highlighted the inequalities as to how the pandemic affects women and children. For instance, 70 per cent of health workers globally are women, which puts them at a higher risk of infection. Meanwhile, this year alone, 42 to 66 million children are susceptible to end up in extreme poverty. **Those are facts that must be considered in our approaches to the pandemic, as this means that children are among the most susceptible and should therefore be at the centre of our decisions.** Parliamentarians have a key role to play in adjusting 2020 budgets accordingly and in preparing 2021 budgets while prioritizing access to healthcare to all, particularly women and children. I would like to thank our partners at EWEC for inviting me and affording me an opportunity to be part of the effort to bring PMNCAH to the fore of the international health agenda.



Participation during 12 June WHO Press Briefing focusing on PMNCAH. (Picture from UN WebTV)

The week thereafter, I addressed a **web dialogue on the Gendered Impact of COVID-19**, which was organized by the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE-PA)**. This was another opportunity to raise awareness about the risks specifically faced by women and girls amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This underlines the need to ensure that our policies are gender-sensitive, and in particular, that women and girls have access to the healthcare that they need. I would like to express my sincere thanks to **Mr. George Tsereteli, President of OSCE-PA and Mr. Roberto Montello, Secretary General of OSCE-PA** for inviting me to take part in this dialogue.



World Health Organization's COVID-19 press briefing, June 2020.

The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) convened a **virtual meeting on the IMF responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and policies for an inclusive and green recovery**. COVID-19 threatens not only the health, but also the livelihoods of people around the world. Discussions of this nature are necessary to ensure that decision-makers are best informed on the policies and measures that can help mitigate and ultimately address the economic consequences of this global pandemic.

At this event, I highlighted the IPU's position in this regard, which includes supporting more public investments in the social sector, enacting labour reforms to protect the bargaining rights of workers, calling for measures to lower the cost of remittances, as well as advocacy for better development cooperation. **But most importantly, I also emphasized the need to place the most susceptible at the centre of any public policy geared towards recovery.** Economic recovery must be fair and free of the structural imbalances that have prevailed until now, including gender disparities that prevent women from realizing their full potential. I am grateful to **Mr. Liam Byrne, Chair of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and IMF**, for inviting me to participate in this dialogue.

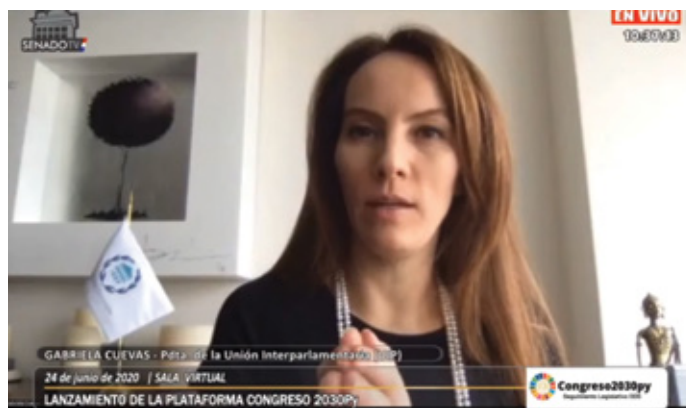
At the end of that week, I was invited to speak at the **closing session of the e-conference on Strategies for Transformative Global Leadership**. The conference was organized by the United Nations Office at Geneva and the World Academy of Art and Science, and covered a wide range of relevant global issues, such as human security, multilateralism, global governance climate change, ecology, civil society, youth, and social movements, to name just a few.

The conference was also aimed at providing a forum for in-depth consideration of the kind of leadership required to adequately respond to global challenges. The moderator of the closing session itself was **Mr. David Chikvaidze, Chef de Cabinet of the Director-General of United Nations Office at Geneva**. I delivered closing remarks along with **Amb. Amanda Eliss, Adjunct Senior Fellow at East-West Center; Mr. Ismail Serageldin, former Vice-President of the World Bank and a WAAS Fellow; and Mr. Garry Jacobs, President and CEO at WAAS.**

At the plenary, I called attention to the fact that in order to critically examine leadership, we must include the women and young people perspective to bringing new ideas and talents and ensuring that they are included in major decision-making processes. Moreover, I pointed out that leaders themselves must put people as a whole at the centre of their decisions – they must have passion for both humanity and our planet. That is the way to exercise the kind of leadership that we need in order to build more inclusive societies. I would like to thank both organizing institutions for affording me the opportunity to deliver closing remarks at this timely week-long event.

The **President of the Senate of Paraguay, Mr. Blas Llano** requested me to participate in **the virtual launch of the Congreso2030Py platform**, an oversight and accountability

legislative mechanism aimed at monitoring progress on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Paraguay.



Launch of the *Congreso2030Py* platform (Picture from the Senate of Paraguay's YouTube channel)

I commend the Senate of Paraguay for this initiative: tools such as *Congreso2030Py* not only allow lawmakers to adjust measures to sustainable metrics-based approaches, but they also constitute a necessary component of democratic political systems. **This is precisely what revitalizing democracies in our world entails: transparency, accountability, and open government.** I am grateful to Mr. Blas Llano for affording me the opportunity to take part in this launch, which will certainly prove beneficial to developing a sustainable future in Paraguay.

Also that day, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation, and Disarmament (PNND) held a webinar titled **"United Nations 2020: Enhancing peace, disarmament and the role of women"**. Disarmament is central to our Organization's agenda – the IPU was founded precisely to establish peaceful coexistence in the international system. Accordingly, **in this webinar, I emphasized that our budgets should be based on peace, and not on war.** Increasing military expenditure is a worrisome trend, whereas those resources could be used for rebuilding back better. Needless to say, priorities must be redefined; I was honoured to share this view with fellow panellists and the over 300 participants who attended the webinar live. I would like to thank PNND for organizing this event and for inviting me to take part in it.

Later that week, I attended **the first virtual meeting of the Action Group to foster a water-sensitive approach to legislation and regulation ahead of the Ninth World Water Forum in 2021**. As President of the IPU, I underlined that the Forum must take full account of the capacity of parliaments in their representation, budget-making, and legislative oversight functions. By working through parliamentarians, the World Water Forum can have a greater impact.

At the end of June, **we commemorated the International Day of Parliamentarism, as well as the 131st Anniversary of the IPU through the Quintet Meeting**. On this occasion, we were joined by **Mr. Ahmad Bin Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud, Speaker of the Shura Council of Qatar**, President of the 140th IPU Assembly;

Mr. Mladen Grujić, Member of the IPU Executive Committee, who was representing **Ms. Maja Gojković, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia**, President of the 141st IPU Assembly (Belgrade, October 2019); and **Ms. Donatille Mukabalisa, Speaker of Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda**, who will also be President of an upcoming IPU Assembly (Kigali, 2021). **Mr. António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations**, also sent a message for the celebration with us. **The meeting events also included the launch of the IPU's 130th Anniversary Book in commemoration of the IPU's lasting legacy.** I would like to extend my appreciation to all those who attended the Quintet Meeting and marked this day of commemoration with us.



IPU Anniversary Book Virtual Launch during the Quintet Meeting.

Ours is a history to celebrate and reflect upon. In my remarks, I underscored the fact that over the span of 131 years, our Organization has grown from a small group of MPs to the now 179 Member Parliaments and 13 Associate Members. As the commendable efforts of Mr. Al Mahmoud and Ms. Gojković in hosting the respective IPU Assemblies in their countries have shown, the IPU finds its strength and prestige in its parliamentary membership. I have no doubt that Ms. Mukabalisa will organize the next IPU Assembly in Kigali in 2021 with the same amount of energy and resolve.

I also took the opportunity to make some remarks at the launch of the IPU's 130th Anniversary Book. **The book remains a very important undertaking to me: it is about the legacy and prestige of the world's oldest multilateral political organization.** As such, it commemorates not only the IPU, but also parliamentarians and the essential role they play in democracy.

I am happy to note that the IPU's legacy is now enshrined in this book, in large part due to the valuable contributions we received from national parliaments. Let me thank all those who joined in the effort to make this a reality. Once again, I also wish to take this opportunity to extend my most heartfelt gratitude to the **Kuwait National Assembly and its Speaker, Mr. Marzouq Al Ghanim**, for their invaluable support.

Also during that month, I presided over **three virtual meetings of the Executive Committee – on 11, 18, and 26 June.** Those meetings were necessary in order for me to confer with my colleagues on matters such as reviewing the possible scenarios for the 142nd IPU Assembly, our relation with the United Nations,

examining our Organization's financial matters, receiving a report to recommend a transparency strategy for our Organization, providing updates for the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, and the presentation of the reports of the Presidency and the Secretariat.

During June, **I prepared and addressed a letter to Speakers of Parliaments, calling on parliaments to secure political and financial support to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030.** I signed the letter jointly with UHC2030's Co-Chairs and was supported by the rest of the UHC Movement Political Advisory Panel. It is my sincere hope that this message will resonate with parliamentarians worldwide as we deal with a pandemic – current circumstances certainly demand increased prioritization of health systems.

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities – women, children, and adolescents have been particularly impacted in terms of their health. This was the premise for **"Lives in the Balance - A Covid-19 Summit on the Health and Well-being of Women, Children and Adolescents"**, which was co-hosted by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and the CORE Group. The **PMNCH Board Chair, Ms. Helen Clark**, invited me to make remarks at a session in July. I am grateful to **Ms. Helen Clark** for affording me that opportunity.

Once again, I highlighted **the need for inclusive decision-making processes which involve those who are most affected by the pandemic**, particularly women and youth. I also took the opportunity to sound a word of warning about the undemocratic trends resulting from the pandemic, given that parliaments have been forced to limit their work, and that oversight of government action has been severely curtailed.

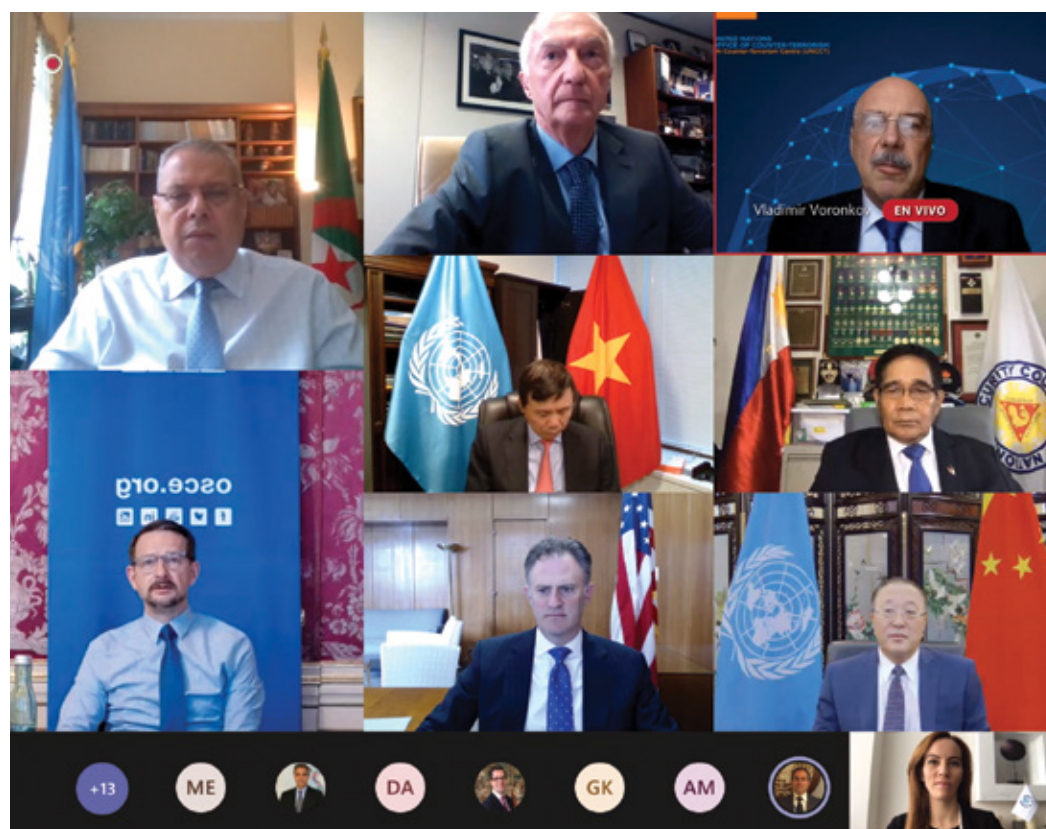
Later on that same day, several parliamentary organizations (including ours) coordinated with PNND to hold an **international parliamentary consultation on Parliamentarians and the UN Disarmament Agenda.** This was a follow-up on the United Nations Secretary-General's 2018 disarmament agenda, *Securing our Common Future*, and afforded parliamentarians an opportunity to provide input on a draft parliamentary handbook: **"Assuring our Common Future: A Guide to Parliamentary Action in support of Disarmament for Security and Sustainable Development"**.

In my remarks, I spoke about the social and economic implications of excessive military spending, particularly as relevant sectors – such as healthcare – could be better funded in order to address the problems affecting the day-to-day lives of people around the world. As parliamentarians play a key role in disarmament efforts through their legislative, government oversight and representation duties, this proved to be a productive exercise and will certainly positively affect parliamentarians' action on disarmament.

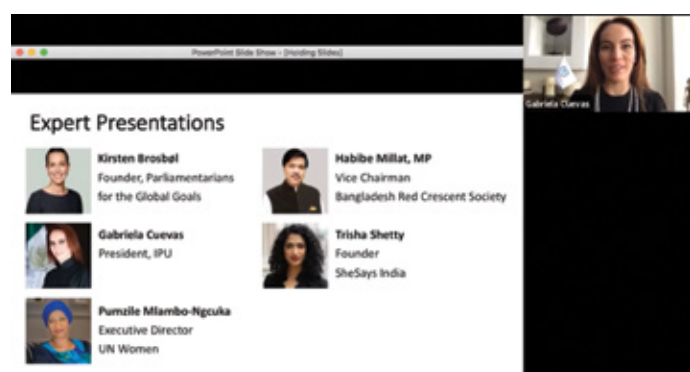
The President of the National Assembly of Venezuela, Mr. Juan Guaidó, organized **a meeting of Latin American Speakers of Parliament.** At the opening of the meeting, I emphasized that silence in the face of undemocratic practices has not been

and will never be an acceptable alternative. Our own Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has reported that 134 cases are under investigation for Venezuela alone. I urged the Speakers of Parliament in attendance to show zero tolerance for setbacks to democracy in our home region.

Following that event, I participated **in a panel focusing on the challenges facing Central American migrants in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**. It was organized by a number of organizations, including the Harvard Global Health Institute, *Agenda Migrante*, Tufts University, the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education and Mexico City's Human Rights Commission. I highlighted the impact of border closures in the region and how they affected migration flows and remittances. With or without a pandemic, the factors that lead people to migrate are still present, and so is the need to take those people into account.



[Closing session of the UNOCT Virtual Counter Terrorism Week.](#)



[Presentation during the Webinar for Parliamentarians on COVID-19 and Gender Equality \(SDSN YouTube channel\)](#)

The COVID-19 webinar series for parliamentarians co-organized with SDSN and PFGG continued in July, this time with the focus on the gender imbalances faced by women when it comes to domestic violence, disparities in domestic workloads, and the job market. With Ms. Kirsten Brosbøl as moderator (she also gave an expert presentation), we heard insights on gender and COVID-19 from Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, as well as Ms. Silvana Koch-Merin, President and Founder of Women Political Leaders (WPL); Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa, former President of the United Nations General Assembly; Ms. Pumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Execu-

tive Director of UN Women; and Ms. Trisha Shetty, Founder of SheSays India. The webinar was attended by Parliamentarians from over 60 countries. As President of the IPU, I also contributed by making a presentation. **In light of the stark inequalities specifically affecting women, I called on my colleagues to ensure that women's voices are included in parliamentary work.** I would like to thank our partners for their continued collaboration in making this possible.

Also during that week, the Action Group to foster a water-sensitive approach to legislation and regulation for the Ninth World Water Forum met to discuss our action proposals for the Forum. I presented the IPU's proposal, which, as mentioned earlier, underlines the need to include parliamentarians in their representation, budget, and government oversight capacities.

That same day, at the invitation of Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, I participated in the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week's closing session, "Member States' Counter-Terrorism Priorities in the Post COVID-19 Environment and synergies and complementarities between the COVID-19 and the counter-terrorism agenda". I welcomed the opportunity to represent the IPU at this high-level event.

On that occasion, I noted that terrorism thrives in places where opportunities are lacking, and that countries with the highest number of terrorism victims are also those whose peoples are denied a voice. In the end, terrorism knows no religion or

nationality, and we must think of the victims who suffer from the fear and destruction that it creates.

I participated in the **Launch of 2020 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General's Independent Accountability Panel "From Page to Action: Accountability for the Furthest Left Behind in COVID-19 & Beyond"** on the margins of the High-Level Political Forum. In this event, I was asked to deliver remarks primarily from an accountability angle. To be clear, I explained that accountability entails representing the people and providing them with meaningful results. Moreover, accountability mechanisms must be adapted and implemented at the national level. In this regard, parliaments play a key role by exercising oversight. This is essential to ensuring the effectiveness of policies geared towards women's, children's, and adolescents' health. I would like to thank the Independent Accountability Panel for seeking my input in the launch of the report.

Also on that day, I participated in the **first virtual workshop of Generation Equality's Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership** on behalf of our consortium with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Women Political Leaders (WPL). This first meeting allowed us as members of the Action Coalition to introduce ourselves and share our expectations and priorities in regard to this initiative.



Parliamentary Forum at the High-Level Political Forum, 2020.

Our **Parliamentary Forum at the High-Level Political Forum** also took place on 15 July. The **President of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, Senator Juan Carlos Romero**, was the moderator. We also heard presentations from **Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD**; **Dr. Kate Roll, from the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, University College London**; **Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Board Chair of ActionAid International and Chief Executive of Rosaria Memorial Trust**; **Mr. Lorenzo Fioramonti, MP, Chamber of Deputies of Italy and Professor of Political Economy at the University of Pretoria**; and **Ms. Wafa Bani Mustafa, MP and Vice-President of the IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable Development**. We wish to thank them for their contribution.

In my opening remarks at the Parliamentary Forum, I sounded a note of warning about the impending risks of failing to deliver on the SDGs, particularly as progress is lost to the pandemic and pre-existing inequalities are exacerbated. **We must understand that the SDGs are the means to achieving shared**

prosperity for all, and that parliaments must ensure that they fail to deliver on their essential role of ensuring that the SDGs become national realities.



Dialogue with Dr. Manuel Otero, IICA Director General and Ms. Antonella Cavallari, IILA Secretary General (IICA YouTube channel).

During July, I was also invited by **Dr. Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy for 2021 Food Systems Summit**, to be a part of the **Champions Network of the United Nations Secretary-General's 2021 Food Systems Summit**. I accepted the invitation – I believe that its outcomes would help alleviate not only global hunger, but also malnutrition and the diseases it causes. In addition, it would reflect the relation between food systems, climate change and biodiversity, which thus far has been detrimental to sustainability. Dr. Kalibata's call for an action-oriented agenda which takes account of interdependent factors such as climate, the environment and health, is certainly one that is well suited to yield sorely needed solutions in this domain.

In conjunction with the IPU's Advisory Group on Health, we prepared a statement on the recent outbreak of COVID-19; the statement was prepared with technical input from the World Health Organization thanks to the efforts of **Dr. Habibe Millat**. **Ms. Saraí Nuñez-Cerón**, member of the Advisory Group on Health and MP from Mexico contributed as well. The **UHC2030 Secretariat** also sent comments and observations. The statement was posted on the IPU's website in early August. I commend the **Chairperson of the IPU Advisory Group on Health, Ms. Given Katuta**, as well as the Group members for the hard work that went into this insightful document.

On August, I participated in a **virtual dialogue with Dr. Manuel Otero, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture**, together with **Ms. Antonella Cavallari, Secretary General of the Italo-Latin American Institute**. We discussed new scenarios for international cooperation following the breakout of the pandemic. In particular, there is a need to restore faith in the multilateral system and to regain the people's trust in both national and international organizations. I would like to thank Dr. Otero for inviting me to this insightful conversation.

We had the third iteration of our Webinars for Parliamentarians, which was co-hosted with SDSN and PfGG. This time, the focus was on COVID-19 and climate change. Once again, parliamentarians and staff from over 60 countries participated. In my opening remarks, I **pointed out that the pandemic has**

reminded us of the extent to which our “normality” has a significant impact on the environment in our immediate surroundings. When the pandemic first appeared, city-dweller began to see clear blue skies more frequently, and not just as an exception. Some cities around the world even saw an improvement in their air quality, and people began to wonder whether they had simply gotten used to poor air quality previously.

On that occasion, we heard expert presentations from **Ms. Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Mr. Selwin Charles Hart, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Climate Action; and Dr. Phoebe Koundouri, Professor in the School of Economics at the Athens University of Economics and Business.** We wish to extend our sincere appreciation to all of them for accepting our invitation and sharing their views with parliamentarians.

The following weeks in August were crucial for the preparation of the **Thirteenth Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament** and the **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.**

During **two separate meetings that I presided over on 6 and 7 August, the Preparatory Committee** went about making final arrangements for the then impending virtual proceedings. This also included an in-depth review of the text of the Declaration of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. **Several hours went into deliberations on this matter, with a lively discussion on the language and the core message to be conveyed in the declaration.** I must highlight the fact that members of the Preparatory Committee put a great deal of effort into, and I commend them for the commitment they exhibited at a very important moment for our Organization.

Amidst our busy preparations, I was invited by Professor Juan de Dios Cincunegui to deliver **a guest lecture to Argentinian students of parliamentary law at Universidad Austral on 10 August.** This was a chance to have a lively exchange of ideas with them about the role of parliaments in international relations, and I was glad to share my experience as President of the IPU. I would like to thank Dr. Cincunegui for giving me that opportunity.

After much preparation and effort following the first Preparatory Committee meeting in February 2019, 17 August marked the beginning of what proved to be momentous occasion, not only for this Presidency, but also for the IPU as a whole. On that day, the **13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament began with an opening session.** I delivered opening remarks along with **Ms. Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler, President of the Federal Council of Austria, and Ms. Doris Bores, Vice-President of the National Council of Austria, with Ms. Claire Doole, a former BBC correspondent supported the proceedings as anchor.** The opening remarks were followed by a keynote address given by **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women.**

In my opening remarks, I said that while remarkable progress was made on gender equality, **much still remains to be done to ensure that ours becomes a just world for women.** By way of example, I cited the fact that in 25 years, the percentage

of women parliamentarians worldwide has grown from 11 per cent to a mere estimated 25 per cent. Women Speakers make up less than 20 per cent of Speakers of parliament worldwide, while women heads of State and heads of government make up only 5 to 6 per cent of leaders globally. While these are positive developments, they remain insufficient. Inequalities still persist in regard to wages, political inclusion, access to health-care, and violence. However, I also noted that in light of this bleak outlook, the Summit must be an occasion for promoting women in leadership.

The subsequent discussions touched on particular aspects of **women’s parliamentary leadership in the context of COVID-19: women’s roles in the management of emergencies, economic empowerment and financial inclusion, as well as fighting violence against women and girls.** I am happy to note that several Speakers actively engaged in the discussions and provided valuable input.

I would also like to thank **Ms. Yolanda Kakabadse, former President of World Wildlife Fund International,** for her introductory remarks the first discussion, as well as **Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict** and **Ms. Susan Kihika, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, for delivering introductory statements for the third discussion.** I am also grateful to **Ms. Fawzia Zainal, Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain; Ms. Rebecca Alitwa Kadaga, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda; and Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh,** for stepping into moderate our discussions.

The 13th Summit concluded **with a roundtable on preparing future Summits of Women Speakers** to devise ways of improving the impact of events of this nature.

Our momentum continued with the **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.** The Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held on 19 and 20 August and brought together over one hundred Speakers who engaged in lively dialogue about the most pressing issues on the global agenda. This was the latest iteration of such Conferences, which have been held every five years since 2000.

During those two days, several Speakers presented reports on **youth participation, gender equality, democracy and parliamentarism, science and technology, and sustainable development.** Discussions were also held on **human mobility, parliaments, and governance, building sustainable economies, and the perspective of victims of terrorism.** Former BBC correspondent, **Ms. Claire Doole,** also supported the proceedings as anchor.

I delivered opening remarks along with Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the Austrian National Council, and Mr. António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General. Afterwards, we held an interactive debate on health, climate, and the economy, which I had the honour of chairing. Our sincere thanks go to our special guests, **Ms. Sarah Gilbert,** Professor of Vaccinology at the

University of Oxford, **Ms. Phoebe Koundouri**, Professor at the Athens University of Economics and Business President-Elect of the European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists, and **Mr. Jeffrey Sachs**, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development and Professor at Columbia University, for joining us. The interactive debate was followed by presentation of the first conference reports. The speakers included **Mr. Kenneth Lusaka from Kenya**, **Ms. Donatille Mukabalisa from Rwanda**, and **Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury from Bangladesh**. They introduced us to the report on *Making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality: Best practices and parliamentary commitments*. Thereafter, Speakers **Lord Fakafanua from Tonga**, **Ms. Fawzia Zainal Bahrain**, and **Mr. Slimane Chenine from Algeria** presented the report on *Stepping up youth participation in politics and parliaments: From words to action*. Finally, Speakers **Mr. Chuan Leekpai from Thailand** and **Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen from Norway** also presented their report on the *Decade of action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The first day concluded with two panels. **Mr. César Litardo from Ecuador**, **Ms. Roser Suñé from Andorra** and **Mr. Haorun Kabadi from Chad** were the Lead Speakers for our panel on **climate change**, with participations from **Ms. Yolanda Kaka-badse**, former President of WWF, and **Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba**, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the 2019 Climate Summit. At the conclusion of this panel, Speakers **Ms. Laura Rojas from Mexico**, **Mr. Mustafa Şentop from Turkey** and **Ms. Zinaida Greceanii from the Republic of Moldova**, led the panel on human mobility, with **Ms. Gillian Triggs from UNHCR** and **Mr. Gilles Carbonnier from the International Committee of the Red Cross** participating as panellists.

The presentation of conference reports continued into the second day, beginning with the one on *Democracy and the changing role of parliament in the 21st century*, which was presented by Lead Speakers **Mr. Demetris Syllouris from Cyprus** and **Ms. Rebecca Kadaga from Uganda**. The last report on *Science, technology and ethics: Emerging challenges and urgent solutions* was presented by Speakers **Mr. Yariv Levin from Israel** and **Ms. Akiko Santo from Japan**.

At the conclusion of the presentations, **Mr. Jan Anthonie Bruijn from the Netherlands** and **Ms. Puan Maharani from Indonesia** led the panel on governance, with the participations of **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**, Executive Director of UN Women, and **Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild-Drummond**, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Commemoration of the United Nations 75th Anniversary. I then presided over the next panel on inclusive economies with along with **Speaker Mr. Jacob Mudenda from Zimbabwe**, with **Mr. Augustus Nuwagaba**, Professor at Makerere University, and **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana**, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The final discussion convened with a **special event on the perspective of victims of terrorism and violent extremism**. We heard testimony from **Mr. Imrana Alhaji Buba**, founder

of the Youth Coalition Against Terrorism. Lead Speakers **Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka from Austria** and **Ms. Beatriz Argimón from Uruguay**, as well as **Mr. Reinhold Lopatka**, President of the IPU HLAG on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, participated in the panel; **Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly**, Director General of the United Nations Office at Vienna and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and **Mr. Vladimir Voronkov**, Under-Secretary-General of UNOCT also joined in the discussion as panellists.

At the conclusion of those proceedings, **the Declaration on parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet was adopted by consensus**. The Declarations always constitute politically relevant messages, because **they carry the full weight of the endorsement of parliamentarians from around the world**: representatives who are closest to the needs and voices of their people.

The Declaration was prepared in a democratic, representative, and inclusive manner, commensurate with gender parity. Moreover, it is also opportune, because it includes stronger references and covers substantive issues. For instance, it includes several proposals on parliamentary action the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, green economic recovery, achieving gender equality, and combating climate change, to mention a just few examples.

At the Conference's closing session, I delivered closing remarks along with Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the Austrian National Council, and Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the United Nations General Assembly.

This proved to be a challenging exercise, because we were forced to adopt a virtual format due the ongoing pandemic. I wish to extend my most sincere gratitude to all of the Speakers who actively contributed to our deliberations; the Preparatory Committee members who worked tirelessly to make this Conference a reality; and the special guests who accepted our invitation to join the IPU for this momentous occasion.

I should also point out that, with the view to improving the next iterations of such events, **the Preparatory Committee members will meet in October to take stock of what worked this time around and consider ways to improve the conduct of future events.**

Following the conclusion of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, I resumed travel – while taking all necessary precautions – **with a visit to Pakistan in August**, at the invitation of **Senator Sadiq Sanjrani, Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan**. I am very grateful to the Chairman and the people of Pakistan for their kind hospitality.

The visit was hectic but fruitful. I was able **to make a presentation on the IPU's 130th Anniversary Book along with members of the Pakistani parliament**. I also met with **Mr. Sanjrani himself; Mr. Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan; Mr. Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan; as well as the Chief of Army Staff and**

Ministers of Economic Affairs, National Food Security and Research, and Foreign Affairs; with Mr. Asad Qaiser, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, as well as the Chief Minister of Punjab.

After my visit to Pakistan, I travelled to the Republic of Turkey from 29 August to 11 September. I also had a very busy agenda on this visit. I wish to thank Turkey for the kind reception it accorded me. I also wish to recognize its commitment to the IPU. We also held a Launch of the 130th Anniversary Book of the IPU here. I wish to extend my appreciation to **Mr. Mustafa Şentop, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and Ms. Ravza Kavakci Kan, President of the Turkish IPU Delegation,** for the fruitful meetings we held and for their kind attention during my visit.

I also held high-level meetings with **Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkey; Mr. Mevlut Cavusoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ms. Ruhsar Pekcan, Minister of Trade, and Mr. Akif Cagatay Kilic, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.**

At the beginning of September, **WPL and Women 20 (W20)** invited me to join their panel on **“Power parity: getting to a new normal in political representation”**, which took place on **2 September**. It is always important to me to participate in initiatives and events which involve building more inclusive societies and governments. My special thanks go to **Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Chair of Women 20, and Ms. Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Founder and President of WPL,** for affording me the opportunity to participate in the discussions.



Meeting with Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkey.



Launch of the IPU 130th Anniversary Book in the Republic of Turkey.

I was interviewed by MEP María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos (Renew Europe Group) who is also a member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. The interview came ahead of an upcoming publication by the European Parliament under the title *“Parlamentarias al Frente de la Lucha contra el Hambre y la Malnutrición”* ([Women] Parliamentarians at the front of the fight against hunger and malnutrition), with the focus on the role of women parliamentarians in Africa and Latin America.

The overall purpose of this initiative is to recognize the contribution of women parliamentarians to ensuring food security, addressing malnutrition and promoting the public policies and actions which can guarantee nutrition and food security for members of the general public. I welcomed the opportunity to join Ms. Rodríguez Ramos in sharing my perspective on the role of parliaments in addressing global challenges of this nature.

While I was away on parliamentary diplomacy duty during September, **I also had to follow up closely on the IPU's involvement at the General Assembly.**

This included ensuring the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU, an endeavour which began in March this year and entailed considerable effort and time.

After working closely with the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations in New York, our efforts yielded a resolution which recognizes the central role of parliaments in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the IPU's work on issues such as democracy, gender equality, youth empowerment and human rights, to name just a few.

The Resolution is a major historical achievement for the IPU, because it recognizes the essential role of parliamentarians in multilateralism. **Moreover, it also reflects the relation between the IPU and the UN, which is profound and involves dealing with matters of relevance to our planet, and must continue into the future.** I am very grateful to **Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente and the Permanent Mission of Mexico** for their invaluable support in making the Resolution a reality. I would also like to extend special thanks to the Speakers for their assistance with the Resolution, which was **co-sponsored by 76 UN Member States and was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly on 4 September.**

Moreover, participation in this year's United Nations General Assembly was very different in nature, in that the proceedings were held in virtual format for the most part; as a matter of fact, we were unable to hold face-to-face or bilateral meetings. **In the meantime, global problems still require solutions.**

I must mention that the IPU's participation in the high-level meeting to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations was unclear at the outset. In view of our long-standing relation with the United Nations, and the fact that both Mr. António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, and Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President of the 74th Session of the General Assembly, both participated in our Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, **I insisted that the IPU be given the opportunity to send a message to the global community at that important forum.**

In the spirit of the Speakers' Conference, I reached out to both Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande and Mr. Volkan Bozkir (President of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly) to advocate for our Organization. **After exchanging correspon-**

dence, I am pleased to announce that Mr. Bozkir has finally informed us that the IPU will be able to participate in the high-level meeting for the UN's 75th Anniversary by means of a pre-recorded video statement. Mr. Bozkir has informed us that the high-level meeting is due to resume on 26 October and all the speakers, including Permanent Observers, such as our Organization, will have an opportunity to take the floor. In view of the fact that the next President of the IPU will be elected on 4 November, Mr. Bozkir also announced that he expected this pre-recorded video statement from me. It is important to mention that it was forwarded to the IPU Secretariat on 17 September, for forwarding to the United Nations.

In addition participating in the event, **I also sent pre-recorded videos to enable our Organization to take part in the high-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as the high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.** Moreover, I also sent a pre-recorded video statement **to the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity, having been invited by Mr. Muhammad-Bande to take part as a panellist.** This attests to the strong relation existing between the IPU and the United Nations, a relation that I have vowed to maintain during my Presidency.



For this year's International Day of Democracy, the IPU organized an interactive panel debate with Arizona State University: **"COVID-19 and Democracy: Can parliaments come to the rescue?"**, which took place on 15 September. Participating in the panel were **Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights via a pre-recorded video; Ms. Xiye Bastida, one of the lead organizers of the youth climate justice movement, who made remarks; Mr. Craig Calhoun, University Professor of Social Sciences at Arizona State University; Mr. Andreas Norlén, Speaker of the Riksdag; and Mr. Ghassan Salamé, Professor of International Relations Emeritus at Sciences-Po Paris.** I was pleased

to join these distinguished participants for an important reflection on parliaments and their role in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 17 September, I addressed the opening of the 27th I.A.O. General Assembly, which was held in virtual format. I emphasized that parliamentarians must build people-centred societies. I would like to thank **Mr. Sergei Gavrilov, President of the General Assembly of the I.A.O., and Mr. Andreas Michailidis, Secretary General of the I.A.O.,** for the invitation.

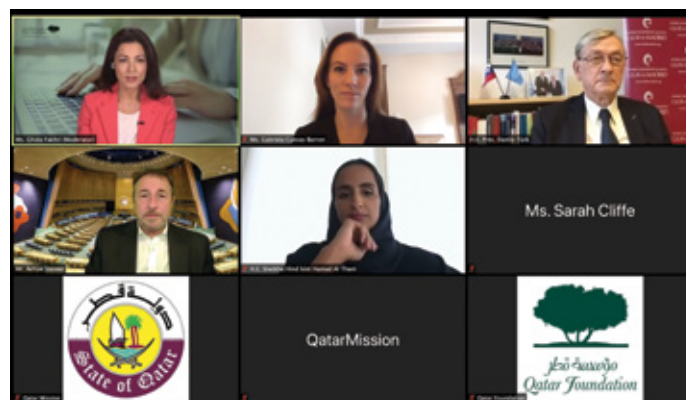
In the lead-up to 75th session of the United Nations, the IPU also hosted an event to present the key messages of the Declaration of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament later on that day. The event was open to United Nations Permanent Representatives and Speakers of Parliament.

We were honoured to have the participation of **Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th Session of the General Assembly,** as well as **Mr. Jacob Mudenda, Speaker of the National Assembly of Zimbabwe and a Member of the 5WCSP Preparatory Committee.** **H.E. Mr. Alexander Marschik, Permanent Representative of Austria, H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar; and H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan and President of ECOSOC** took part as discussants. I welcome the continued engagement between the IPU and the United Nations, as demonstrated by this virtual event. I am very grateful to all those who made this possible.

I delivered remarks at a high-level strategic dialogue titled: **“Advancing Inclusion & Representation in Government” in the framework of the 2020 Concordia Annual Summit.** Dialogues on inclusion at the government level are always timely and relevant. I would like to thank **Mr. Matthew Swift and Mr. Nicholas Logothetis, Co-Founders of Concordia,** as well as **Ms. Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Founder and President of WPL** for affording me the opportunity to participate.

I also participated in the **SDG Action Zone** at two events. I took part in a session titled **“The Future of Leadership: When Women Lead,”** which was hosted by Women Political Leaders (WPL). During the session, I emphasized that we should prioritize gender equality in politics so as to build a better world and ensure that more women are able to take on leadership roles. I would like to thank **Ms. Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Founder and President of WPL,** for affording me the opportunity to be a part of this conversation.

Moreover, on September 24, I participated in the official launch ‘Parliamentarians for the Global Goals’ (PfGG), an initiative focused on parliament-led SDG implementation. PfGG is a necessary parliamentary-led effort aimed at enhancing SDG action. **The IPU has reported that only 14 per cent of parliaments around the world are actively involved with the 2030 Agenda.** PfGG would be working to change this by actively involving parliaments in taking SDG-oriented action. I would like to thank **Ms. Kirsten Brosbøl, Founder of PfGG,** for affording me this opportunity and I wish her success in this endeavour.



COVID-19 and Education: the largest disruption in the history of education.

On the margins of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, I was invited by **the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, and the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the United Nations** to take part in a high-level virtual event titled **“COVID19 and Education: the largest disruption in the history of education”**, which took place on 23 September. Education provides everyone with the opportunity to participate in their societies and find openings in their lives; as such, it is a fundamental right. Unfortunately, the pandemic will adversely impact the future of students all around the world – holding a discussion on this matter is not only timely, but also necessary. We must seek solutions to this problem, and this which is why I am grateful to **H.E. Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar,** for including me in the dialogue.

Finally, I visited the Republic of Moldova at the invitation of **Ms. Zinaida Greceanii, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.** We gave a joint presentation on the IPU’s 130th Anniversary Book. I am grateful to Speaker Greceanii for her very warm hospitality and kind attention. In addition to this, I also had meetings with **Mr. Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova; with Members of the Delegation of the Parliament of Moldova to the IPU; Mr. Ion Chicu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova; Mr. Oleg Tulea, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration; the Chairs and Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations, and the Legal Committee on Appointments and Immunities.**

The last decades have witnessed exponential technological advances. This is likely to pose unprecedented challenges for lawmakers around the world. One interesting example is Chile. **Its Senate is currently preparing to introduce a neuroprotection law and to amend the Constitution so as to protect mental integrity in light of the progress on so-called neurotechnologies.** While I recognize the many benefits that neuroscience can bring to humanity, I must also acknowledge and commend the Senate of the Republic of Chile for tackling the ethical challenges of neurotechnologies head on. My special thanks go to senators **Ms. Adriana Muñoz D’Albora and Mr. Guido Girardi Lavín** for **the invitation take part in a virtual meeting to discuss this subject;** this will no doubt create a precedent for parliaments elsewhere.

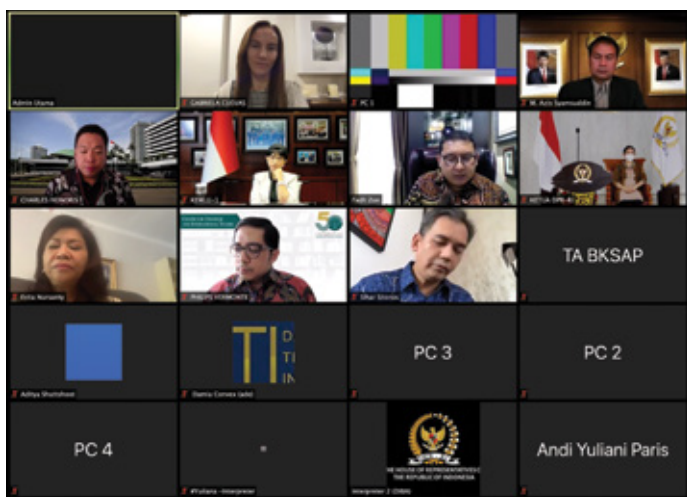


Presentation of the IPU 130th Anniversary Book in the Republic of Moldova.

The House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia held a virtual launch of the IPU's 130th Anniversary Book. This was an opportunity for a very engaging and lively dialogue with my colleagues, reflecting their continued commitment with our Organization. I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the **Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dr. (HC) Puan Maharani**; the **Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Ms. Retno Marsudi**; **Vice Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, Dr. Azis Syamsuddin**; the **Chair of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, Dr. Fadli Zon**; the **Vice Chairman of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, Mr. Charles Honoris**; and the **Executive Director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mr. Philips J. Vermonte**, for taking part in this event.

In line with my commitment to be an active and engaged President, **I held a meeting with Right Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila, Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives**, to introduce the **Conference of Speakers and Heads of African Parliaments (CoSAP)**, announce the **African Speakers Debt Cancellation Campaign Initiative (DCCI)** and explore possibilities of collaboration between CoSAP and the IPU. Building partnerships makes the IPU a strong and relevant organization. As such, I would like to thank Speaker Femi Gbajabiamila for reaching out. It is my wish that there will be room for collaboration in view of yielding beneficial results for both parties in the future.

Before my term ends on October 19, I also expect to meet with the Co-Chairs of the recently established **International Parliamentary Network for Education (IPNEd)**, **Dr. Gertrude Musuruve Inimah** and **Ms. Harriett Baldwin, MP**, to further discuss possible opportunities for collaboration with the IPU. I will also join in a **virtual launch of the IPU's 130th Anniversary Book** with the **Speaker of the Shura Council of Qatar, Mr. Ahmed Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud**. Finally, I will be presenting a report on the overall activities of the Presidency at the 206th session of the Governing Council of the IPU, due to be held virtually in November.



IPU Anniversary Book Launch, Indonesia.

Closing statement by the President of the IPU

I wish to thank the Speakers of Parliament; each and everyone of the parliamentarians who have participated in the initiatives of this presidency and have provided their invaluable support. My special thanks also go to the First Vice-Presidents of the Executive Committee, Mr. Konstantin Kosachev and Mr. Chen Guomin; all the members of the Executive Committee, the presidents and bureaux of the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security, the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights, the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the Committee on Middle East Questions, the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, the Advisory Group on Health, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians.

I also wish to thank the chairs and boards of the High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, the Sub-Committee on Finance, the Group of Facilitators for Cyprus, and the Gender Partnership Group. In addition, I wish to say that I highly value the enthusiastic and committed support of their bureau members who give a parliamentary soul to their debates and decisions. They take the lead so to ensure that IPU resolutions and the outcomes of panels, events and seminars are conducive to yielding solutions to our people when we return home to implement them.

Moreover, owing to the very important agreements and opportunities for collaboration that we have over the preceding years, my gratitude also goes to Mr. António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General and his team, to Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, and Mr. Volkan Bozkir, the Presidents of the General Assembly with which I had the great opportunity to work, the heads and leaders of the United Nations agencies with whom I have collaborated, to the heads of state, heads of government, ministers, civil society organizations and the media.

Needless to say, I also wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the working team in the IPU Secretariat and my Office in Mexico City, to the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico, and the Presidents of Mexico Mr. Enrique Peña Nieto and Mr. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, with whom I have also collaborated.

My dear colleagues,

I was first elected as a parliamentarian at age twenty-one. Being elected as President of the IPU has been an extraordinary experience, often demanding diligence and commitment to the greatest extent. I am deeply honoured and grateful for the trust that you have placed in me; I have endeavoured to elevate the global standing of our Organization, to make it an institution that is close to its members, and to further consolidate it as a key player within the international community – all with the purpose

of upholding and instilling a parliamentary spirit in every single one of our undertakings.

It is my sincere hope that this drive persists and outlasts my term as President. It is my wish to see the IPU remain at the forefront of global affairs and continue to bring a much-needed parliamentary dimension to global governance. These are indeed very trying times, but we must not lose sight of the fact that we stand at a pivotal moment in the history of humanity. By being the necessary link that transforms international agreements into national and local realities, the IPU must not divert from its indispensable position in contributing to the solution to the challenges facing our planet.

As my term as President comes to an end, I want you to know that I have faith in the 46,552 parliamentarians of our world, in a most convinced and resolute manner than ever before. We can be a driving force in the decisive action that our world so desperately needs. I wish to take this opportunity to recall the foreword to the IPU 130th Anniversary Book. Remember, my colleagues:

We are the generation that can change history.

We are the generation that can either stop climate change or condemn the planet to self-destruction. We are the generation that can achieve gender equality, or the one that perpetuates the patterns of violence against women. We are the generation that can open the doors of politics to young people or deliver the fatal blow to public confidence. We are the generation that can redefine human solidarity, or bolster nationalism and close borders to migrants and refugees. We are the generation that can revitalize multilateralism or build walls and create divisions. We are the generation that can end poverty or increase hunger and inequality.

In the end, I look back upon these past three years with a great deal of joy and satisfaction. The experiences, the dialogues and the joint endeavours that we have embarked upon will leave a lasting memory that I will carry into the future. Once again, allow me to once again express my sincere gratitude for granting me this opportunity of a lifetime. I wish you the best in what the future holds for all of you, and while this may be a farewell in my capacity as President of the IPU, I hope that we still find opportunities to work together for a better future in the years to come.



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

T +41 22 919 41 50

F +41 22 919 41 60

E postbox@ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
CH – 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva
www.ipu.org

Gabriela Cuevas Barron

IPU President

T +52 1 55 2270 8667

E president@ipu.org