



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Remarks by Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron IPU President

UN General Assembly debate on Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU

New York, 22 May 2018

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The partnership between the UN and the IPU began to take root 20 years ago in response to people's demands for a more transparent and accountable global governance system that yields evermore tangible results. .

As the forces of globalization grew stronger, people everywhere felt increasingly vulnerable and left out of key decision-making processes at the UN, the WTO and other international bodies. Our vision then was to help bridge this gap by bringing the voices of the people's representatives to the UN and by helping parliaments hold member States to account for delivering on their global commitments.

How far along are we in our journey?

While we can be proud of many accomplishments, there is no denying that we have not arrived yet at our final destination. In fact, the situation around the world today calls on all of us to redouble our efforts and consider new ways to work together so that we can be at once more effective in our action and more ambitious in our vision.

Today, old and new conflicts are raging on around the world and peace and security remain elusive for too many people. Climate change is driving people from their homes in search of safety, food and clean water, placing them in new peril. Equality between women and men, while improving in some areas, is far from realized and is facing new and pervasive threats, particularly for women in politics. Income and wealth inequality have reached unprecedented levels and are eroding the very foundation of the social contract that keeps countries together. Politics everywhere has grown more divisive and polarized, undermining people's confidence in their own governments. So this meeting today gives us an opportunity to reflect on our relationship and to retool as needed.

As a long serving parliamentarian, I know first-hand that parliamentarians are important to successfully addressing the daily concerns of citizens, as well as meeting their expectations and aspirations for a better, more equitable, more sustainable world

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, a former parliamentarian himself, recognizes the importance of engaging with parliamentarians in international decision-making to ensure that the work done here in this room and in this building is materializes.

His report identifies the many points of engagement by parliaments and the IPU, right across the United Nations system, to address the needs of the world's citizens in an ever more complex environment. When the UN engages the peoples' representatives in its deliberations, the outcome is more likely to reflect the founding principle of the UN Charter, of "we the peoples".

The Secretary-General's report highlights IPU and UN work together on democracy and human rights, peace and security, disarmament, gender equality, and sustainable development.

Today's resolution is a reflection of that important work. It also opens the door to new areas of cooperation, including on sustaining peace, on interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue and on countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. The IPU has already partnered with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on a Joint Programme to counter terrorism and violent extremism. The initiative seeks to bring parliaments and governments together to address a modern-day scourge to which no society is immune, and one which poses a serious threat to peace and security. The preventive approach which parliaments can drive is intended to complement the reactive one of governments.

As legislators and opinion-makers, parliamentarians have vital leadership positions in their countries. Our task, as the world organization of national parliaments, is to help create common ground among parliamentarians so that their voices across parties and genders can be articulated into a strong parliamentary perspective on global affairs. Our aim is to rally the people's representatives around solutions that work for all of the people of this world, as well as for the sustainability of the planet.

Through the IPU, parliaments provide ideas and positive input into UN processes, conventions and agreements, and are a valuable resource to the UN, working to implement those agreements.

In the process leading up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the IPU and its 178 Member Parliaments worked to contribute to the 17 goals. We are particularly proud that what emerged in the end as Goal 16 clearly acknowledges the key role of inclusive, representatives and transparent institutions of government. This posits parliaments as key agents of change but also as institutions in need of change so that they can support the entire 2030 Agenda. Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, IPU Assemblies, our Annual Parliamentary Hearing here in New York, and a wide-ranging programme of work have allowed us to provide solid input into the goals and their indicators.

Just like the UN, the IPU has been working hard to ensure its 178 Member Parliaments are fit for purpose to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, and to ensure no one is left behind.

Among other things, we help our Members to engage with the High-Level Political Forum and in their country's Voluntary National Reports. The IPU side-event during the HLPF attracts a large number of parliamentarians.

Whether in our IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs, in our regional seminars, through direct support to parliaments, or through our handbooks, the IPU is working to ensure that parliaments deliver. Key to this is our strong support for democratic governance as an enabler for sustainable development, as well as an end in itself. Alone but also in partnership with UNDP and other UN entities we work to strengthen the capacities of parliaments to carry out their law-making, oversight and representative functions. This includes ensuring that parliamentary committees review legislation, budgets, policies and programmes

in ways that are commensurate with the inter-connectedness of the goals and are consistent with national SDGs plans. .

Two years ago, the UN General Assembly resolution on interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU invited us to cooperate with the UN on migration. I wish to salute the e critical work being done here in New York as you negotiate a new Global Compact for Migration, as well as in Geneva, where the Refugees Compact is being ironed out. And I can tell you, we have delivered.

For the past year and a half, the IPU has focused on migrants and refugees and the role of parliaments in supporting a human-rights based, coordinated approach to such cross-border movements. Our Declaration on migrants and refugees from the IPU Assembly in Geneva in March is the culmination of this long consultative process among our Members. With this Declaration, parliamentarians made a commitment to help change the negative narrative of migration from a threat to an opportunity to be seized with the appropriate policies in all countries.

In the area of women's empowerment and addressing violence against women, particularly violence against women in politics, the IPU has partnered with UN Women and others to take resolute action. Our joint parliamentary meeting at the annual session of the Commission for the Status of Women continues to provide a unique parliamentary perspective to UN deliberations on women's issues.

Our ground breaking study in the autumn of 2016 identified the pervasive nature of the sexism, harassment and violence against women MPs. The very presence of women in leadership, in spaces thought to be male preserves, is causing a backlash that must be addressed. IPU is helping parliaments adopt codes of conduct, and encouraging them to train MPs and staff to prevent this kind of violence and encourage more women to seek election.

We commend the UN Secretary-General for his work to create a more gender-inclusive UN system, starting with his senior leadership gender-parity achievement. He is leading by example.

Around the world, parliaments must be more inclusive and representative, reflecting the broad range of societal concerns, and working most effectively for all their people. The IPU's Forum of Young Parliamentarians is working to imprint their perspective on the world's agenda, including by participating in the yearly ECOSOC Youth Forum.

Lastly, let me draw your attention to a new initiative in this draft Resolution. Starting this year, we will be recognizing 30 June as the International Day of Parliamentarism. We hope this day, at the UN and in our 178 Member Parliaments, will provide an opportunity to celebrate leadership, and encourage the more than 46,000 parliamentarians around the world in their work.

Being a parliamentarian comes with a host of challenges. In fact, the hard work never stops. Many of our colleagues around the world work with limited resources. Many are ostracized or marginalized in their own parties. Too many of them are illegally persecuted and their voices silenced. And of course, in this all too often male-dominated political universe, women parliamentarians are working doubly hard on behalf of their citizens.

I am very pleased that from now on we will have this special day to remind the world community of the importance of parliamentarians and, by extension, of politics, as a calling and a service to our citizens that deserves more respect while at the same time striving to improve.

As President of the IPU, I pledge my support to ensuring our two organizations working together will make a tangible difference to the people of this world.

Thank you.