



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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President's activities report

(a) On his activities since the 198th session of the Governing Council

Since the previous Assembly, I have been in close and regular contact with the IPU Secretary General and his colleagues at the Secretariat in Geneva and at the New York Office. We have discussed a number of issues affecting the Organization, namely: membership, the revised IPU Strategy and the new cooperation agreement with the United Nations.

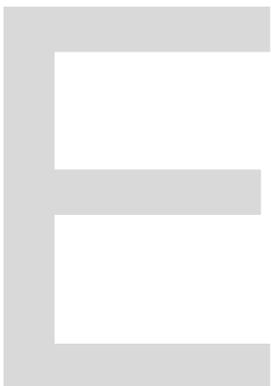
I have reached out to Members in a bid to strengthen or enhance existing ties and forge new ones. One of my principal aims was to heighten the IPU's visibility through various media – personal contacts, social media and official missions. Following is a summary of activities I have undertaken since the 134th Assembly in Lusaka.

I travelled to Bucharest in April at the invitation of the Romanian Parliament to address a special joint session of the Romanian Parliament. My visit coincided with the 125th anniversary of Romania's membership of the IPU. In my address to Parliament on 18 April, I paid tribute to the longstanding and loyal membership of the Romanian IPU Group and Romania's contribution to the Organization over the years. Romania had hosted the 27th IPU Conference in October 1931, bringing together some of the most prominent politicians of the era. Its efforts in the interwar period and in East-West parliamentary talks in the 1960s had been highly appreciated.

Romania was also hosting a regional seminar for Central and Eastern Parliaments on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on 18 and 19 April. This initiative bore testament to its commitment to the IPU and its leadership role in the region. On that occasion, Romania adopted a comprehensive Declaration on the SDGs, the first of its kind.

I met President Klaus Iohannis and we discussed a wide range of issues, including the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs and the new UN climate change agreement, the contribution of parliamentary diplomacy to world peace, and the refugee crisis affecting Europe. I also held separate talks with the Speaker of the Romanian Parliament and Romanian Environment and Foreign Affairs Ministers.

The historical deal reached in Paris in December 2015, clinching the first ever universal climate change agreement was signed at UN Headquarters on 22 April 2016. Coming from a South Asian nation that regularly bore the brunt of the devastating effects of climate change, and representing an organization that advocates for climate change action, I took part in the event in New York. The IPU's ground-breaking Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change would become even more relevant.



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At the invitation of the Speaker of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, I went to Moscow, where I addressed the Russian Parliament on 18 May. I thanked Russia for taking on a more prominent role within the IPU and within the Eurasia geopolitical group in recent years.

True to its core mandate, the IPU had been instrumental during the height of the Cold War in facilitating the first meeting between then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. The Organization continued to promote the peaceful settlement of differences through political dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy.

While recognizing Russia's longstanding membership of the IPU, I urged MPs to continue working for peace. The role of parliaments was crucial in delivering a better world by framing appropriate laws and undertaking proper oversight of measures such as those aimed at achieving the SDGs. I also stressed the IPU's commitment to democracy, the rule of law, good governance and human rights. Highlighting IPU Assemblies as a valuable platform for parliamentary diplomacy, and discussing and responding to topical issues, I said that the IPU continued to tender its good offices to parties in conflict as an honest broker with no hidden agenda.

I met ministers and officials and attended a full session in St. Petersburg of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Parliamentary Assembly was now an Associate Member of IPU, having formerly held Permanent Observer status. My tour of St. Petersburg convinced me that the setting would make for an ideal venue of a future IPU Assembly.

On 21 May I headed for the Gulf States, where I was welcomed in Kuwait by the Speaker of the National Assembly. We discussed avenues for strengthening cooperation between the IPU and the Kuwaiti Parliament, the representation of women within the legislative body and the political situation in the Middle East. The following day, I paid a courtesy call on the Prime Minister of Kuwait and was also received by the Acting Emir of the Gulf State.

Another longstanding Member of the IPU – Lithuania – invited me to participate in the celebrations to commemorate the 26th anniversary of its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In my address to the Seimas, I called on MPs to ensure that the country produced a robust plan to achieve the SDGs. Parliamentarians had a duty to their constituents to improve living standards in a world that was currently uncertain, unsustainable and unsafe. Pointing to actions in the region in recent years which were reminiscent of the Cold War, I stressed that the IPU was ever ready to offer any help it could to mediate and facilitate dialogue in the search for lasting peace.

Lithuania had come a long way since the Cold War. It was now a member of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The UN Human Development Index listed Lithuania as a "very high human development" country in addition to being one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. Lithuania should be proud of its achievements and serve as a model for the whole region.

I congratulated the country for its progressive attitude towards gender equality and youth empowerment, embodied in the first women President and Speaker of Parliament and several young members of parliament. I urged the parliament to play a more active role within the Twelve Plus geopolitical group and within the IPU as a whole.

New York beckoned again in July, when the debate in the UN General Assembly on the resolution *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union*. This resolution provided an opportunity for the country holding the IPU Presidency – Bangladesh - to take the lead in rallying UN Member States around to support the motion. In the end, the resolution was adopted by consensus on 25 July with a total of 77 co-sponsors. On that day, I addressed the UN General Assembly to highlight the benefits of greater interaction between the UN system, parliaments and the IPU, and participated in the signing ceremony of the resolution. I am confident that it will provide a valuable framework for taking our strategic partnership even further, for the good of our global community.

In a similar vein, the new cooperation agreement between the IPU and the United Nations was concluded and signed in New York on 22 July 2016. I welcomed the new agreement as an enhanced framework for more robust engagement between the IPU and the United Nations. That agreement was the culmination of a long and intense process. Soon after I had been elected IPU President, I convened a joint meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and the Committee on United Nations Affairs in November 2014 to discuss ways of strengthening the institutional relationship between the IPU and the United Nations. That desire was reflected concretely in the Declaration adopted by the Speakers of Parliament at their World Conference in August 2015, who called for both organizations to “expand their cooperation”.

On 28 August I travelled to Astana, Kazakhstan, at the invitation of the Kazakh Senate to open an international conference on *Building a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World*. The event coincided with the International Day against Nuclear Tests - 29 August. This is a cause that is close to my heart and one in which I have been involved for many years. In Astana I had a meeting with President Nazarbayev to discuss how parliaments and governments can work together to promote nuclear disarmament. I also held meetings with the Speakers of the two Chambers of the Kazakh Parliament and encouraged closer interaction with the IPU. We discussed the possibility of Kazakhstan hosting a future IPU Assembly.

I was invited to address the 2016 World Congress of the International Peace Bureau (IPB) in Berlin from 30 September to 3 October. With a shared concern for peace and dialogue, both organizations have a long history of good relations. The Congress focused on the reallocation of military spending through disarmament for sustainable development, topics that are high on the IPU's agenda. In my address, I praised the IPB for its good work to promote harmonious relations between nations in an age marked by violence, terrorism and turmoil. In their own ways, both the IPU and the IPB worked for a world without war.

I returned to New York on 20 September to attend the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group (HLAG) Meeting on Every Woman Every Child, held in the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. The Group discussed the roadmap to guide the transition of the Every Woman Every Child movement and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) into the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The following areas of work were suggested for the HLAG members to provide political leadership and mobilize action: (1) Thrive: investment in the early years; (2) Transform: strengthen cross-sector collaboration; and (3) Survive: humanitarian and fragile settings.