



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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137th IPU Assembly

St. Petersburg, Russian Federation
14–18 October 2017



Governing Council
Item 10

CL/2017/10(i)-R.1
12 October 2017

Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(i) **Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa on *Empowering youth: Enhancing political participation for more inclusive and peaceful societies***

Abuja (Nigeria), 27–28 September 2017

The National Assembly of Nigeria and the IPU organized a Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa on *Empowering youth: Enhancing political participation for more inclusive and peaceful societies*. The Conference took place in Abuja on 27 and 28 September 2017 and was part of a series of IPU regional events to empower young parliamentarians and promote youth participation in politics. The Conference brought together 32 young men and 16 young women parliamentarians from 15 countries, with the average age being 38. They were joined by over 100 young leaders of State assemblies, youth parliaments, civil society organizations, and international agencies.

Participants examined the current state of youth participation in Africa. They identified means and strategies to increase the number and influence of young MPs in parliaments, including through youth quotas. They resolved to call on political parties to open up space for young people and increase financial support to facilitate their running for public office. They also emphasized the important role of youth caucuses and networks in mobilizing action in parliaments, and the importance of working with grassroots youth organizations, student associations, and youth movements. Building on the Not Too Young To Run campaign undertaken to mobilize global action to lower the age of eligibility to run for office, the participants agreed to revisit existing legal frameworks in their respective countries.

The participants also examined the link between political participation and the prevention of violent extremism, and identified concrete measures to address the drivers of violent extremism, such as poverty, marginalization, gender inequality, and misgovernance. They committed to ensure that their countries have a plan of action to prevent violent extremism, able to respond to youth needs and interests, and to create legal frameworks, allocate resources and oversee the implementation of these plans. They also agreed to support educational and public awareness programmes to prevent conflict and extremism, and resolved to support the empowerment of women and girls and to eliminate discrimination and inequalities. As community leaders, the young MPs also highlighted their role in addressing religious misconceptions to foster an environment of dialogue, understanding, and peace.

The young parliamentarians welcomed the IPU's continued offer of support for youth participation and young parliamentarians, including through international and regional youth conferences, as well as through legislative support, capacity-building, and mentorship activities for young parliamentarians.

#IPU137



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Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa Abuja, Nigeria

**27-28 September 2017
Outcome Document**

Co-Rapporteurs: Hon. Raphael Igbokwe, Member of Parliament (Nigeria)
and Hon. Munah E. Pelham-Youngblood, Member of Parliament (Liberia)

We, some 200 participants comprising 32 young men and 16 young women parliamentarians from 15 countries, gathered in Abuja, Nigeria on 27 and 28 September 2017 for a Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa, entitled *Empowering youth: Enhancing political participation for more inclusive and peaceful societies*. The young parliamentarians worked in partnership with leaders of State assemblies, youth parliaments, civil society organizations and international agencies. The average age of the parliamentarians was 38.

Over the course of two days we examined and debated the issues of youth political participation and the prevention of violent extremism. We resolved that these issues are closely interlinked. The exclusion of young people from democracy and decision-making institutions can drive their inclusion in violent extremist groups. If violent extremism is to be prevented, young men and women need to be fully represented at decision-making tables, so that their voices and ideas can be loudly and clearly heard.

As the houses of the people, our parliaments are places of dialogue where diverse groups come together. In order to get policy right, including by adopting and ensuring implementation of relevant legislation and effectively holding our governments to account, all segments of society need to be represented, especially youth. We, as young representatives closest to our country's young men and women, are best placed to channel the views and concerns of youth to the decision-making table. Yet we are vastly underrepresented in parliament. We affirm the urgent need to step up efforts to enhance youth participation. We have heard enough talk, it is time to step up efforts and take strong and bold action now:

- Constitutions should embody youth participation. Laws should facilitate the election of young women and men, including through youth quotas and the lifting of high age restrictions to run for office. If you are old enough to vote, you are old enough to run!
- Well-thought-out and well-funded policies and programmes should empower young women and men politically, socially, economically and culturally. Youth parliaments, councils and other types of youth associations are among the many vehicles to this end. School and civic education should place greater emphasis on preparing children and young people for engagement in politics and on nurturing aspirations for public service.
- Political parties should open space for young people, both women and men. They cannot continue using young people to rally votes, campaign and garner support without also giving them a seat at the table. They should instead enlist young people as candidates and support them as a fair, win-win proposition.
- Given the important role of finance in electoral campaigns, public funding should be ensured for the youth wings of political parties. It is also essential to cap campaign funding, to level the playing field.

- Last but not least, youth should back youth. Young parliamentarians should be encouraged to support, coach and share their networks with young candidates. It is also time for young people to take action themselves and grow their own social capital, by engaging strongly with their communities, contributing to their development and proving themselves valuable to the people. Power is never given, it must be earned!

We are well aware that our power is derived from the people we represent, and therefore our main responsibility is to stay close to the constituencies that have given us their trust. We reaffirm the importance of sustained engagement with our communities between elections, to continuously receive their feedback. This can be achieved through digital and non-digital means, such as town halls.

Cross-party youth caucuses and networks should be promoted as a key way for young MPs to consolidate their efforts and address issues of common concern. Mentorships and capacity-building activities are other ways to strengthen the impact of young MPs in influencing change.

We call on IPU to support us and our parliaments in achieving these ends.

We salute the work being done in Nigeria to lower ages of eligibility through the "Not Too Young To Run" campaign, and we endeavour to spread this campaign beyond Nigeria's borders. We are also inspired by the work of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of Nigeria, which is acting as a link between Nigerian youth and the country's government and parliament. We place high hopes in the new endeavour spearheaded by the Forum to ensure that 20% of the public funding for political parties be granted to their youth wings.

We resolve to follow up in our respective countries on the discussions held and decisions taken during this Regional Conference, including by:

- Reporting to our respective parliaments on the recommendations adopted here and sharing them with our colleagues;
- Supporting and mentoring young candidates in coming elections at both local and national levels;
- Lobbying other parliamentarians and politicians, of all ages, to introduce measures for the enhancement of youth participation, be it through quotas or alignment of the minimum age for candidates with that required to vote;
- Sharing the knowledge that we acquired during the Conference with young people in our communities and with civil society youth groups.

The risks of excluding young people from political decision-making and eroding their trust in our democracies are grave, contributing to apathy, discontent, and even violent extremism. But political marginalization is one of many such drivers in Africa, including lack of education, lack of socio-economic opportunities, unemployment, poverty, inequality, and discrimination. One worrying issue raised during our discussions is a tendency among politicians to use religion in their electoral campaigns, which exacerbates differences and closes communities, even in societies untroubled by such phenomena a few years back.

Economic justice, respect for diversity and equal access to opportunity are better weapons against violent extremism than military or security activities. While necessary, such activities address only the symptoms of deeper problems, and not their root causes as needed to secure sustainable peace.

What is required is a more comprehensive response, targeting the deeper causes of violent extremism while helping to protect and fulfil human rights, democracy and good governance. We agree that the essence of leadership for young parliamentarians is in the action we take to counter misgovernance, poverty, inequality and discrimination, and therefore resolve to do the following:

- Ensure that our countries have a plan of action for the prevention of violent extremism, bringing the perspectives of youth to policymaking, the creation of legal frameworks consistent with international human rights commitments, and the oversight of implementation, resource allocation and delivery;
- Support policies and laws to help prevent violent extremism through a comprehensive and holistic approach that addresses its many drivers;

- Conduct effective oversight of security-focused interventions to ensure that they are grounded in, and compliant with, human rights laws and norms, and the rule of law generally;
- Support ambitious educational programmes that promote peace and human rights, are gender-sensitive, and help counter narratives conducive to violent extremism;
- Push our governments to allocate more resources to ensuring access to education, healthcare, science and culture for every child in our respective countries;
- Promote women's participation in decision-making; mainstream gender perspectives and build capacity for women and civil society groups;
- Support the empowerment of women and girls as well as efforts to combat illiteracy, prevent gender-based violence and reduce school dropout rates;
- Promote industrial innovation and skills development programmes to create jobs for young people;
- Address under existing policies the needs of persons with disabilities, and encourage their political participation;
- Challenge religious misconceptions and the misuse of religion in our public communications;
- Engage in mediation and dialogue to resolve conflicts and tensions as they arise, in particular when young people are involved;
- Exercise oversight of the judicial system so as to better avoid the radicalization of young people in prisons.

We welcome IPU's continued support for youth participation and young parliamentarians. We ask IPU to support capacity-building and mentorship activities for young parliamentarians at national level and to convene another Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa, in one or two years, to take stock of progress made.

We express our thanks to the National Assembly of Nigeria for hosting the First Regional Conference of Young Parliamentarians of Africa with efficiency and generosity.