



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# 134<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly

Lusaka (Zambia), 19 - 23 March 2016



## Inaugural address 134<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, Lusaka

Saturday 19 March 2016

His Excellency, Mr. Edgar Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia  
Honourable Patrick Matibine, Speaker of Parliament,  
Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General,  
Mr. Alhendawi, Representative of the UN Secretary-General,  
Special guests,  
Distinguished members of parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for us to be here in this beautiful city of Lusaka for our 134<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Our presence today would not have been possible without the generous offer to host us by the Zambian authorities and their relentless work over the past several months to make it all happen here. So my deepest appreciation goes to the organizing committee for their diligence and tireless efforts. You can rest assured that it will all be worth it!

We gather today in Zambia, a landlocked country in southern Africa with a rich and colourful past, as well as amazing natural treasures. This country embodies diversity at its best, with no less than 73 local languages being spoken within its territory. This rainbow nation is home to many tribes, ethnic groups, religions and cultures.

And here, ladies and gentlemen, as we inaugurate this Assembly, our thoughts go to a late son of the soil who had a strong connection to our Organization and who was a true champion of the IPU. I am referring to former President Michael Sata, I understand that Mr. Sata presided over what was then known as the Fourth Committee on Parliamentary, Juridical and Human Rights Questions for four years and worked closely with our current Secretary General, who was then Secretary of that Committee. Furthermore, Mr. Sata was a member of the IPU Executive Committee. I think that given our presence here in Zambia, it is only fitting that we pay tribute to this statesman. I invite you to stand and observe one minute of silence in his honour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet under the overall theme "Rejuvenating democracy: Giving voice to youth". Some of you might be wondering why we have decided to focus on youth when there are so many other pressing issues affecting the world today. You are right. But at the heart of many of these issues – be it migration, terrorism or conflict - are disenfranchised, unemployed and disillusioned young people. Youth empowerment has become a topic of global concern, so much so that the UN Secretary-General has appointed a Special Envoy on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan, who is representing him here today.

#IPU134

As you know, the IPU is premised on the value of inclusiveness, both at the level of parliament and society at large. The IPU promotes the ideal that all sectors of society – women, indigenous people, disabled persons and youth – should be included in decision-making processes. It thus promotes inclusion in parliament, which should mirror society in its composition. In fact, parliament should be a microcosm of society. It is high time that we practise what we preach and set the example for others to follow.

I mentioned disenchanted and disillusioned young people earlier. Many of them are fed up with politics and politicians and have lost confidence in the public institutions. It is for this reason that many of them never show up at the polls on election day, convinced that their vote will not make a difference.

I say that it is for us, fellow parliamentarians, to change the public's perception of us and the institution we serve – parliament. We must regain people's trust in us and inspire young people in particular to enter politics, serve their constituents and bring their voice to the table. We must convince them that in a democracy, every voice actually *does* count.

Part of young people's disillusionment also stems from their dire socio-economic situation. How many bright, talented, well-educated young people do we know in our own countries who simply cannot find a job? So what do they do? Some of them settle for poorly paid jobs while others linger, loiter, fall into the wrong company or are pushed through despair to delinquency or worse. Some have lost all hope and see no point in living so they turn to violent extremism and terrorist acts. As we all know, masterminds of criminal and terrorist acts can be very persuasive and know all too well how to brainwash gullible and naïve youth who have lost their way.

That is why it is so urgent for us to modernize democracy and breathe new life into it. The IPU is endeavouring to do just that through its own standards-setting work and advocacy. It is currently preparing, together with UNDP, the second edition of the Global Parliamentary Report. This edition will deal with parliaments' power to hold government to account. You will be approached by staff asking your views on this and I encourage you to take the time to fill out the relevant questionnaires and give interviews.

Fellow parliamentarians,

We have to act and we have to act now. We cannot allow the next generation to wallow in despair. We must work both on the prevention and the cure. We must delve deeper into the root causes of the scourges afflicting our world today and surgically remove them before they grow into cancers.

Another topic that has captured our full attention and was the theme of our previous Assembly is **migration**. Children and young people make up a sizeable portion of the waves of refugees still making their way into Europe, fleeing persecution, conflict and in search of a better life. Will they indeed find a better life or will they be judged on their appearance, religion and country of origin? The one thing that all young people across the world want and need is HOPE. Can we not give them even a little glimmer of hope by adapting our economic policies, our immigration policies and in general, our way of doing politics?

I had the privilege of addressing the Third Global IPU Conference of Young Parliamentarians just a few days ago right here in Lusaka. I was heartened to see so many eager, enthusiastic and bright young people and politicians exchanging ideas and experiences and spreading the message of hope. I was particularly struck by their sense of solidarity with others less fortunate than themselves and their empathy toward young people who were forced to migrate in the direst of conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What I took away from that Conference and what I would like you to take away from our deliberations over the next few days is that young people are not just our future; they are also our present. They are tomorrow's leaders. They are full of potential and brimming with energy and exuberance. Let us try to find ways and means in our respective parliaments and countries to harness and tap into that positive energy so we can give them back the hope that they so desperately seek.

We will also be discussing in the Standing Committees other topics at this Assembly that have a direct or indirect link to youth. One of them is terrorism, another is cultural heritage. Both will result in the adoption of a resolution, which I urge you to follow up on once you return to your respective parliaments. We will also be discussing women's freedom to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference, as well as an emergency item on a pressing and topical issue.

In our bid to move towards universal membership, I hope to announce that we will be welcoming back the Parliaments of Egypt, Comoros and Guyana to the IPU fold. This will bring our total membership up to 170 national parliaments. We will also be welcoming one new Observer and gaining another Associate Member. So we are getting there, slowly but surely. In this regard, I would like to impress upon you, our Members, the key role you can play in your regions as IPU Ambassadors, especially among non-Members.

Fellow parliamentarians,

At this Assembly, we will be circulating the first draft of the revised IPU Strategy, which we will open up for comment and input from our governing bodies and geopolitical groups. It is my hope that once we receive inputs from all our stakeholders, we will be able to adopt the revised IPU Strategy come October at the 135<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Geneva. This policy document, as you know, will define the way we do business for the coming years.

Let me take a few moments to share some thoughts on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will shape our lives for at least the next 15 years. We have won a small battle by helping to define those goals but the big challenge remains how to make our parliaments "fit for purpose" to achieve the SDGs so as to make a real difference to the lives of people everywhere. The IPU, as your umbrella organization, is at your service to help deliver on your promises through workshops, seminars and capacity-building programmes. As a baseline, we will be developing a self-assessment toolkit for parliaments to measure their capacity, identify their strengths and weaknesses and fill the gaps.

I am pleased to tell you that the IPU is innovating and keeping up with the times. You will notice a significant change at this Assembly – less paper, and hopefully less wastage. We are going greener and relying more on modern technology as part of our brand new PaperSmart Initiative. This has been in the making for some time now, but was propelled by the UN Climate Change Conference and the Parliamentary Meeting at COP21 held in December 2015 in Paris, where the IPU unveiled a Parliamentary Plan of Action on Climate Change. In the same vein, we will be holding a panel discussion on ensuring a lighter carbon footprint for parliaments on the last day of the Assembly. You will hear more about this initiative in the coming days. We are counting on your support to take this forward.

On a final note, for those of you who are not aware, 21 March marks International Day of Nowruz. This ancient New Year tradition coincides with the arrival of spring, giving rise to a rich array of customs, rituals and festivities from communities in Western, Central and Southern Asia, to the Caucasus, Balkans and other regions. Nowruz is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. I would like to pay tribute to this ancient tradition.

And now, without further ado, I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.