



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland  
[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

### Address by Ms Gabriela Cuevas Barron

Member of the Committee to promote respect for international humanitarian  
law  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

It gives me great pleasure to be here today. I am Gabriela Cuevas Barron, member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Committee to promote respect for international humanitarian law. I am also a Senator in the Mexican parliament.

On behalf of the IPU, I would like to extend our thanks to the United Nations for organizing this summit. The Agenda for humanity is an ambitious one, which requires the contribution and support of all parts of our society – including parliaments.

In our world today, humanity, dignity and respect for rights are at risk. Protection and assistance are key obligations that our respective States, governments and parliaments must live up to. The task is not easy, and urgent action is needed. More than 60 million people are currently displaced around the world because of conflict and natural disasters. Many others are faced with dire situations as they search for a better life. Some are confronted with poverty; others are at risk of exploitation and trafficking. The current state of play is not sustainable – our collective action must be stronger and more effective.

To achieve this, we need more resources, more coordination, and more political commitment. Only then, will we be able to protect human rights and make humanitarian assistance more effective. With that in mind, we fully support the objectives of this summit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The commitments being made here in this room will only be achieved with strong political will, determination and solidarity. In order to make progress, we will need to pass new laws, or amend existing ones. That will require us to robustly oversee government policy and to hold governments to account on behalf of the people. We must also ensure that all voices are heard and taken into account.

Parliament is the institution that brings many of these conditions together. It is an ally in making a reality of all that you commit to today.

The IPU works for democracy and strong Parliaments. We firmly believe that inclusive and effective institutions that represent and have the power to defend

the rights of all people are at the heart of any effort to enhance humanitarian protection and assistance.

Legislation and legislative reform are two of the primary aspects of responding to humanitarian needs and rights. National laws need to support assistance and protection. They must also facilitate humanitarian aid and relief.

But laws are only as good as the effort and resources put into them. For laws to be properly enforced, budgets must allocate sufficient funding in order to support implementation. Here again, parliaments have an important role to play: they hold the purse strings, and can make sure that adequate funds are available.

Laws also need to be monitored. Parliament and its committees can closely assess the impact of initiatives taken, ensure that they have the desired effect, or modify them accordingly. They should hold government to account, and ensure that humanitarian support is on the political agenda. They can make sure it is not forgotten.

Lastly, if conventions and laws are to be effective, they must be widely known and understood, so that they can be enforced. Therefore, legislative reform must go hand in hand with information campaigns that help to explain laws. Such campaigns involve inviting the media, civil society organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders to join in public education programmes, and to report on implementation. This is the role of parliamentarians as opinion leaders and shapers.

The IPU is fully committed to promoting these principles to parliaments. Not only that, but the IPU will also support parliaments wishing to translate humanitarian principles into their own national legislation.

To perform their role well, parliaments must first and foremost be well informed. Over 20 years ago, the IPU began working on international humanitarian law issues because it discovered that parliaments were largely unaware of their State's international commitments. In cooperation with UNHCR, the ICRC and others, we have since worked on making MPs more aware of humanitarian and human rights law. This is a partnership we will continue to nurture and build on.

Information is crucial. It is the starting point for any action. We are convinced that our efforts will gain in strength. We will achieve that by explaining to a wider audience the real issues that are at stake, and by challenging misconceptions. The IPU has therefore consistently made use of its ability to facilitate debates and the exchange of good practices on IHL and key humanitarian issues. Recent debates held during our Assemblies have focused on internally displaced persons; violence against women in conflict situation; statelessness; and how to facilitate safe and fair migration. These debates have resulted in parliaments identifying their priorities and making

appropriate commitments. The IPU will continue to serve as a platform to mobilize parliamentary action on humanitarian priorities.

For parliaments to act, they need to have adequate internal structures. That is where the role of parliamentary committees is so critical. Through their oversight function, committees can closely follow and assess the impact of initiatives taken, ensure that they have the desired effect or modify them accordingly. This is where the IPU can also be of assistance.

Another important factor concerns skills, support and access to expertise. Committees need to work with the support of expert staff; and members of parliament should have access to training and capacity-building initiatives. The development of tools that members of parliament can use is also fundamental. Over the years, the IPU, UNHCR, ICRC, and IFRC have collaborated on several handbooks for parliamentarians. They have covered topics including international humanitarian law, refugee protection, internally displaced persons and legislative frameworks for disaster relief. This will go a long way to support parliament's work and action.

But for parliaments to act, strong political will is also needed. This is where I believe the international community needs to scale up its efforts. It should give greater visibility to the work of parliaments and value more highly both that work and the other work of individual members.

This leads me to my last point: partnerships.

Achieving the goals set out in the Agenda for humanity will require a collective effort and the participation of a wide range of partners. The core of the progress we make will be based on building partnerships within countries and across borders, as well as between members of parliament, representatives of government, civil society, the media, the private sector and international organizations.

A few months ago, countries from around the world committed to achieving an ambitious agenda for development embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. The ultimate objective of this common global effort is to leave no one behind, and to ensure that societies develop in peace, harmony and respect. Development and humanitarian assistance are therefore interwoven. Building a stronger framework and commitment for humanity and for humanitarian assistance is a baseline for development. It will go a long way towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.