

Secretary-General's Remarks to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament “Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want”

New York , 31 August 2015

It is a great honour and pleasure to address the distinguished speakers of the world's parliaments. You stand for peace. You stand for democracy. You are the embodiment of the opening words of the United Nations Charter: “We, the peoples.”

You meet for the first time in five years, at a moment when the world is gripped by multiple crises, more people have been displaced by conflict than at any time since the Second World War, and climate change increasingly threatens our well-being.

Perhaps most important given your role, this is also a period when Governance structures in many parts of the world are facing a crisis of legitimacy, representation and participation.

We are being challenged to strengthen our collective resolve to promote peace and security, sustainable development and human rights around the world.

Earlier this month, Member States took a bold step in this direction by concluding negotiations on an ambitious and transformative sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals that form the basis of this agenda are people-centred and planet-sensitive. They provide a plan of action for ending poverty and hunger, and a roadmap for building a life of dignity for all. They promise to “leave no one behind.”

I commend you, as parliamentarians of the world, and your organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for the valuable role you played in shaping this new framework. Your contribution to its implementation will be equally critical in ensuring that the agenda is translated from the global to the national. People will look to you to hold your governments accountable for achieving the goals, and to write the laws and invest in the programmes that will make them a reality.

People want education, healthcare and more job opportunities. They want to live without fear. They want to be able to trust their governments and institutions. They want full respect for their human rights and they are rightly demanding a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 addresses democracy by calling for inclusive and participatory societies and institutions. But democratic principles also run through the entire document like a silver thread, from universal access to resources, healthcare and education to decent work opportunities for all.

The task of implementing and monitoring these goals is huge. It requires States to work in strong and close partnership with civil society of all stripes. This has never been more important. And yet, for civil society, freedom to operate is diminishing — or even disappearing.

Dozens of Governments have adopted restrictions that limit the ability of NGOs to work, or to receive funding, or both. As we embark on this new agenda, the State and civil society can and should be partners in building the future we want.

The declaration that you will adopt at this conference outlines your responsibilities in translating the voices of the people into meaningful action.

I am pleased that it includes strong commitments to ending gender-based violence and achieving gender equality. I continue to advocate not only for the protection of women and girls, but for their full empowerment. That includes among your own ranks as parliamentarians! We cannot fulfil 100 per cent of the world's potential by excluding 50 per cent of the world's people: women.

Last month, Member States met in Addis Ababa to adopt a far-reaching framework for financing sustainable development.

Next month, world leaders will come together at the United Nations to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In December of this year, in Paris, France, Member States are coming to Paris seeking to adopt a global climate agreement. All around the world, citizens and forward-thinking business leaders are demanding low-carbon, climate-resilient growth. There is growing awareness that there are tremendous opportunities for countries and companies that take the lead in developing clean energy technologies and markets.

This Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament can help sustain this momentum.

We at the United Nations value our deepening cooperation with you and with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

I look forward to working closely with you in the crucial period ahead.

Let us work together to make this world better for all where all the people of the world can enjoy their human dignity and wellbeing. And I thank you and I count on your continuing engagement and leadership and commitment.

Thank you very much