



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

United Nations Headquarters, New York
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Inaugural address by the IPU President, Mr. Saber Chowdhury

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General,
H.E. Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of UN General Assembly,
Hon. Speakers of Parliament, Hon. Members of Parliament
Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General,
Mr. Forest Whitaker, Special Guest, Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

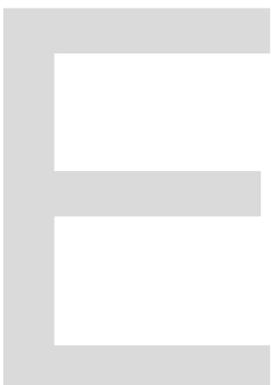
Let me begin by extending a very special and warm welcome to all the Speakers of Parliament from around the world present here today at UN Headquarters in New York for this landmark five-yearly Conference.

I would like to say a special word of thanks to our gracious hosts and valued partner, the United Nations, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Congratulations! Mr. Secretary General, allow me to express how much we value the growing cooperation between the UN system, parliaments and the IPU..

The First World Conference took place in 2000 on eve of the Millennium Summit and through the subsequent Millennium Declaration, the Heads of State and Government acknowledged for the first time the importance of strong cooperation between the UN and national parliaments in all areas, through the IPU as their world organization.

On the other hand, while parliaments and generally other stakeholders were not really involved in the global conversation leading up to the MDGs 15 years ago, this time our Conference is the culmination of two intense years of parliamentary engagement on what the parliamentary community expects to see in the SDGs.

Now that we have been involved in the framing and articulation of the post-2015 development agenda, we must play a robust role in the implementation of the new commitments.



Our institutional relationship with the United Nations has also evolved greatly since our last meeting five years ago - we would like to acknowledge the major role the UNSG himself has played in this process. We very much look forward to signing soon the new Cooperation Agreement between the IPU and the United Nations, which takes stock of the progress achieved over the years and aspires to place our cooperation on a deeper and stronger footing.

Together with the UN General Assembly and other UN bodies we have developed a number of mechanisms such as the annual Parliamentary Hearing. We have ourselves at the IPU also set up a Committee on UN Affairs to bring a parliamentary component to major UN processes. We look forward to further strengthening these mechanisms.

It is a common focus on people and their security and well-being that bring the IPU and UN together as natural partners. Preamble to the UN Charter begins with the words "We the peoples of the United Nations" and the IPU as the world organization of parliaments represents the elected institutions and representatives of the people.

Honourable Speakers, Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet here at a time when the world is at crossroads – half the global population live on less than US\$2.50 a day and it is estimated that 1.2 billion people are affected by some form of violence or insecurity.

A quick glance at the world's balance sheet will show that whilst there has been clear and definitive progress in some areas, thanks in part to the MDGs, the overall picture is one of deficit. Worryingly, the negative trend is more pronounced. Climate change, more frequent and intense disasters, living beyond planetary boundaries, growing inequalities all threaten to undermine progress and hold us back.

2015 is the year when major UN processes are moving to culmination. The Sendai Framework for DRR was agreed in March of this year, SDGs to succeed the MDGs will be agreed upon in less than a month in this very Hall and in December we have the critical Climate Change meetings in Paris. We thus have a once a lifetime opportunity to get it right and steer the world towards a sustainable, peaceful and safer course.

The theme of our draft Outcome Declaration: **Placing democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development: Building the world the people want** captures and articulates this challenge and opportunity.

So how is this Speaker's Conference different from other events and meetings that take place at the UN? Is our Conference also going to be about making pledges? What sets this Conference apart is that we are meeting here to ensure that promises our Governments make, are kept.

With the SDGs, the global community will soon adopt, the most ambitious undertaking ever, to create a new and transformative reality for our world. It is a vision of a brave new world by 2030 which will leave no one behind based on its 17 goals and 169 targets.

Fifteen years back, our governments also tried to create a new reality but issues of governance and accountability were largely absent in the planning and execution. This time round, it is thankfully different.

The SDGs will be the first ever major UN Agreement to include specific action on governance. Effective, accountable, representative institutions will be the engines to drive the implementation of the SDGs.

As you are all aware, the IPU has been seeking your support for the inclusion of a strong reference to the role of parliaments in the SDGs Declaration. Many of you have reached out to your government in underscoring this message and I wish to thank you for the great support.

Our efforts have not gone in vain and the draft political Declaration accompanying the SDGs clearly acknowledges the “essential role of national parliaments”.

As the institution which is constitutionally mandated to hold government to account, to enact legislation and ensure their application, to appropriate resources through the budgetary process to meet goals, parliaments have a unique responsibility and role. It would thus not be an understatement to say that parliaments will be critical to success of the SDGs.

The other point I would like to emphasize is that the SDGs layout through its goals and targets where our destination is. The indicators to evaluate progress will have us to correct the course as needed. But the goals do not tell us what we need to do to reach our destination.

There is no one size that fits all and parliaments will have to debate and come up with their own policy solutions. Strong ownership and buy in to the SDGs will be critical. Let us not underestimate our mandate and ability to effect qualitative change on every aspect of people’s lives. This power has to be tapped into deeper and more extensively than ever before.

You as Speakers of Parliaments are the guardians and custodians of elected representatives. How effective your MPs and parliaments are is determined not by the grandeur of the parliament buildings or by the extensive Rules of Procedure that determine conduct of business but rather by your commitment and your ability to lead and inspire change.

People and planet have to come first as never before. We need to think out of the box. Business as usual when it comes to our economic model and system of governance will not deliver the SDGs.

Political reform and leadership will be essential to success and as leaders of national parliaments, remember that you have the ability, and the mandate, to fashion the political change that is necessary.

This however is a steep challenge and will test us to our limits. Not all parliaments are ready for the enormous challenge that awaits them. As national leaders in your own countries, Speakers will need to ensure that their Parliaments are fit for purpose.

Strong parliaments provide a sound foundation for democracy and peace – both of which are pre-conditions for development.

While the overarching theme of our Conference will focus on the SDGs, we must not lose sight of other pressing challenges that all parliaments and indeed the world at large is facing today.

We know all too well that young people have all but given up on politics. We need to reach out and engage them more meaningfully in the political process. We must let them know that their voice counts and that we value their views. There is also a waning of trust in politics generally and some question whether politics as practised today is part of the problem.

Terrorism is rearing its ugly head as never before. Instead of the peaceful world our founding fathers aspired to at the inception of the IPU, we find ourselves immersed in conflict characterized by unspeakable atrocities and women and children bear the brunt of these.

Hon. Speakers, Parliamentarians, Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a rich and varied programme ahead of us over the next few days. As you know, each Speaker will have a chance to address the General Debate, starting today.

Tomorrow, in parallel with the General Debate, there will be two panel discussions: on parliamentary oversight and the SDGs. This Conference will also offer us all a valuable forum for networking through bilateral meetings and informal exchanges in the corridors.

Let me conclude by saying that the times we live in are extraordinary for the complexity of the challenges that confront us - poverty, conflict, financial crisis, terrorism, migration, climate change, disasters, environmental degradation.

The reality of globalization is that we are all part of a global village and no country is an island. Borders between us are in many respects virtual in that conditions in each country spill over and impact on every other.

Solutions will only be found if we work together on tackling the challenges and this Conference will, I hope, mark the moment when the global parliamentary community comes together, finds common ground and provides the impetus for action through leadership and bold vision.

The IPU is urging Speakers, Parliamentarians and Parliaments to commit to concerted action, lead the drive for change and to put people – our constituents – at the heart of our efforts. The people have placed their trust in us by voting us into high office. It is now our turn to serve them well, fulfil our responsibilities and be deserving of the trust they have reposed on us. I wish us all a very successful Speakers' Conference.

Thank you.