



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# The IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Tokyo

Tokyo, 27-28 May 2015

## Opening Speech by the IPU President, Mr. Saber Chowdhury

Mr. Tadamori OSHIMA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Diet of Japan,

Ms. Karen MAKISHIMA, Head of the delegation of Japan,

Fellow Parliamentarians,

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Colleagues and Friends, Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the IPU, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this unique gathering of Young Parliamentarians from around the world here in Tokyo. Thank you for coming and being a part of this important Conference.

I am so pleased and excited to be here with leaders of today and tomorrow as I passionately believe that the tree of democracy must from time to time be enriched and revitalised with the dynamism, creativity, energy, openness to change and leadership of the youth.

Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the National Diet of Japan for hosting this Global Conference and thank you Mr President, for opening your Parliament to us and for the warmth of your welcome and generosity of your hospitality.

Japan is the perfect setting for us to be exploring our themes of democracy, peace and prosperity and it is indeed a joy and privilege to be here. We continue to learn much from Japan about all three of these as well as preparedness, resilience, innovation and overcoming challenges, including natural disasters.

We meet at a time when major UN processes are coming to fruition. Here in Japan in March this year, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted. In New York in September, Sustainable Development Goals as successor to the MDGs will be adopted and in Paris this December, we are hoping the world will agree on a new Accord for Climate Change. Collectively, these represent a once in a generation opportunity to set the world right. Implementation of these goals will require full engagement of parliamentarians, especially the youth.

We also meet at a time when the lives of young people around the world are at a crossroads. The sobering reality today is that a generation is growing up in crisis – millions have no work, no peace, and no apparent hope of either.

Current figures suggest that one young person in eight around the world is unemployed. That is nearly three times the adult rate. It is disproportionate, getting worse and unacceptable.

When you consider that nearly half the population of the world is below age of 25 – around 3.5 billion people – you begin to fathom just how vital it is to address this issue. But it is not just economic policies that are having an impact. Conflict, lack of education and discrimination are also taking their toll.

Many millions of young people are growing up with their lives blighted by conflict, experiencing the inevitable consequences - violence, poverty, human rights violations and forced migration. Women and girls continue to face discrimination and violence which excludes them disproportionately not just from education, but also from health, wealth and prosperity. Education remains a huge global challenge – the UN estimates that 126 million young people cannot read or write.

Our conference themes of Peace and Prosperity are thus a distant dream. Alongside this, and perhaps because of it, young people have largely become disengaged from formal politics. We must recognize the correlation between lack of youth political engagement and the lack of peace and prosperity and failure to do so will make matters worse and increase manifold the challenges we face.

Youth engagement enriches society. If a generation is left behind, we are all the poorer for it and the task of building stable societies and a fair world becomes even more challenging to achieve. Ladies and gentlemen, where there is a lack of peace, prosperity, political cooperation and fair political representation, we create an unbalanced and unsafe world. One likely outcome is a world of apathy, cynicism, despair and hopelessness. The other side of that same coin is the spectre of radicalisation. Both apathy and radicalisation exclude young people from mainstream political processes. It is vital and an imperative to draw them back in.

This reality brings with it an impact, for all of us. Mass unemployment, injustice, poverty and discrimination, left unchallenged, are a threat to democracy itself, and not just to the individuals experiencing them. It damages, endangers and diminishes us all. We can and must challenge the status quo as it is simply not acceptable and business as usual is very clearly no longer an option.

We have an opportunity here in Tokyo this week to seek positive change through creative ideas and policies that will halt and reverse the trends we are witnessing. Drawing on your insights, creativity, innovation and experiences, we are seeking innovative, youth-led solutions to the key challenges that confront us. We are searching for ways to break the cycle of injustice and disconnection, and create a new virtuous circle, where peace, justice, prosperity and democratic engagement flow from and to each other.

Democracy, peace and prosperity are stand alone themes in their own right but when woven together as they have been for this Conference, add new dimensions – there can be no prosperity without peace and only vibrant, inclusive and participatory democracy can ensure sustained peace. Ultimately, democracy delivers both peace and prosperity.

In backdrop of the global socio-economic crisis that is affecting our young people disproportionately, this Conference provides us with an opportunity to seek solutions and find a way forward. We want to see a lively, robust and candid debate where old problems will be seen through new prism of fresh lenses

Youth unemployment, deprivation, poverty and lives half-lived belong to the museum and not to the future we aspire to, or indeed the future the youth deserve. We seek economic policies that put people, not profits at their heart and to engage young people in ending the conflicts that are impacting their lives so heavily. But alongside these key questions of bringing peace and prosperity, is the question of drawing this generation back into the democratic process.

Our vision is to harness the power of young people to bring about creative change – a peaceful transformation - for all our sakes. We must learn to treat young people with respect as an integral part of us as a global community, not a group to be patted on the head and told to wait their turn until they are older.

Young MPs, you are here as decision-makers and agents of change. Change is never easy and we will face obstacles, difficulties, and setbacks. This task will take time, energy and sustained commitment. You may well face continuing discrimination even within your own parliaments and parties and continuing cynicism from young voters.

But informed by your background, empowered by your beliefs, fortified by your cultures, emboldened by your experiences and confidence to lead, each of you has a unique part to play. Let us work together to ensure our parliaments around the world begin to listen to those whose voices have so far not been heard.

Change is overdue and we commit ourselves to making it happen. We owe it to our young citizens and to all our futures.

It is my pleasure and privilege to be with you and to work with you at this IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. I assure you of my support and solidarity in defining and promoting the youth agenda within the IPU and beyond. I wish you all excellent deliberations and a memorable Conference.