



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

Opening Remarks

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. Saber Chowdhury

Lusaka, 16 March 2016

Mr. Patrick Matibini, Speaker of the National Assembly of Zambia,
Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Mr. Vincent Mwale, Minister of Youth, Sport & Child Development,
Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, the United Nations Secretary-General's Representative to the Conference and Envoy on Youth,
Young members of parliament gathered here today,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues and friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this third IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians here in Lusaka.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the National Assembly of Zambia for hosting this event. Mr. Speaker, thank you for your generous hospitality and for opening your parliament to today's young politicians from around the world.

I would also like to thank the Young MPs of Zambia who are with us and who I'm sure will bring much insight and substance to this Conference.

It is fitting that this Conference and the upcoming IPU Assembly are being hosted in Zambia at a time of tremendous change across the country. In particular, I understand an amended Constitution has recently been adopted. I would like to congratulate the people of Zambia on this historic achievement. I commend you on including in the Constitution provisions for greater youth representation among public office holders.

As I look around the hall today, I am extremely happy to see who has gathered here today under the umbrella of the IPU: so many young parliamentarians, politicians, representatives of youth parliaments, youth organizations and youth advocates from all around the world. You are all most warmly welcome.

I still have the strongest memories about how passionate I and my contemporaries were about bringing about positive change to people's lives when we were younger MPs. And I can tell you that I feel inspired today to be among such committed, creative and driven young MPs, whom I know will make today and tomorrow better for all of us. The energy and enthusiasm that you bring to parliament and the importance of your influence cannot be underestimated.

I often think it's worth reminding ourselves that, when we speak about young women and men, we are not speaking about a group at the margins of society. On the contrary, more than half of the world is under 30. Young people literally hold the demographic balance of power:

- For example, young people between 15 and 24, account for a fifth of the world's population. That is 1.2 billion people.
- Nowhere are young people so strongly represented in the population than in Africa, where nearly 70% of the population is under 30.

This demographic reality must be reflected not only in the ages of the world's political decision-makers, but also in the way political decisions are made. I find it alarming and unacceptable that today, only one in three countries consult young people when crafting national poverty reduction or development strategies. We have to do much better than that. With the development challenges we have before us, we can't allow any group to be marginalized in that way.

2015 marked a major shift in global politics. It was the year that the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted – a set of citizen-oriented aspirations that committed to leaving no one behind. Young people are an integral part of implementing that agenda. The Sendai agreements on disaster risk reduction and the COP21 Paris Agreement on climate change were also adopted. Each of the agreements aims to address the key global challenges faced by all countries and all people through a global partnership.

One of these challenges is the human ecological footprint. Humanity is on an unsustainable path and we are now at a critical crossroads. If we want to provide the natural resources required to maintain current lifestyles for a global population expected to reach almost 10 billion by 2050, then we would need the equivalent of almost three planets.

In addition, the global community is facing a myriad of other challenges including:

- Increasingly high levels of economic and social inequality between and within states and among people.
- Decreasing confidence in governance among the public.
- War, conflict and the spread of terrorism.
- Environmental degradation and insufficient resources to match world demands.
- An unsustainable economic model based on consumption and production instead of well-being.

These challenges do not exist in silos. They are not independent. Rather, they are interconnected and interrelated.

In order to address them, we need to take a holistic approach. We cannot simply measure progress by GDP or a narrow-minded view of indicators. Instead, growth and development should consider human rights, good governance, international solidarity and social impact, including education, health, culture, and well-being.

The post-2015 development agenda, the COP 21 agreement and the Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction all acknowledge this approach.

We are currently at a make-or-break point, where the future of the planet and its inhabitants depends on the decisions that will be made by only a couple of generations. The decisions

that you, the young generation of politicians, make both today and in the future will alter the course not only of human history, but of the planet's history. It is certainly not fair that you have inherited these problems. But be assured that we are standing by your side and that together, we can join forces to tackle this challenge.

To do this, we need to take a people-centred approach. And as representatives of the people, we parliamentarians have a crucial role to play. We give a voice to the people we represent. We are their microphone, amplifying their concerns to the national level and beyond. We also draft and amend the laws that govern our countries, oversee their implementation and hold our respective governments to account. Through the SDGs, all nations of the world are now embarking on a global partnership towards sustainable development. If we are to make the promises of the SDGs a reality, then our role as parliamentarians is more important than ever. The stakes have never been higher:

- **Our parliaments must be *fit for purpose*. They must be ready to weave the development goals into the fabric and institutions of their country, according to its own particular circumstances.**
- **Our parliaments are also institutions that must ensure accountability. That of course means overseeing the implementation of government policies. But it also means ensuring that MPs are meeting the expectations of the people.**

SDG 16 focuses on the importance of governance and effective institutions as a critical enabler of development. Without good governance, the achievement of all the other goals is surely out of reach. In this sense, SDG 16 is in many ways the key to opening the door through which all other Goals must pass. As parliamentarians, we each have access to tools that can support good governance, many of which will be discussed at this conference. These tools could make all the difference in really ushering in *The World We Want*.

In the final analysis, when we speak about Agenda 2030, the SDGs, COP 21, and Sendai, we are really talking about the future. We are talking about re-orienting and repairing the world so that it is more peaceful and prosperous for future generations. As young men and women, you are the torchbearers of tomorrow. As the push to achieve these objectives continues through the generations, we, as senior politicians, must stand by you and support your efforts. **For it is the work that is carried out today that will shape the world of tomorrow. And it is you and the generations that will follow you who will live in that world.**

Sadly, there is still a long way to go. Even though demographically, young people make up a major proportion of the world population, they are among those who are consistently left behind. Did you know that:

- 40% of world youth are either unemployed or working in poverty;
- 500 million young people live on less than 2 dollars a day;
- Young people under 30 make up less than 2 per cent of the world's MPs, even though the under 30s are a fifth of the world's population.

I find the current state of affairs truly unacceptable because young people suffer a double injustice. Not only have they inherited a world in need of repair, but as the key group who can fix it, we are not providing the space they need to influence this colossal undertaking.

Failure to equitably fulfil the rights of young people not only violates an ethical imperative: it is also bad policy. By investing in youth, we are investing in our planet's future. Failure to do so comes at our own peril.

Not leaving young people behind is much more than ensuring their place, your place, as beneficiaries of Agenda 2030. It is also about enabling young people to act as key drivers to bring these objectives to fruition.

As digital natives, and as bearers of new ideas, energy and enthusiasm, young people are ideally equipped to change the world.

Young people should be effectively involved so that they can drive forward the implementation of Agenda 2030. You are a secret weapon that must be harnessed.

This Conference is meant to bring such ideas to fruition. Over the next couple of days, you will have an opportunity to:

- enhance your understanding of the global development agenda by speaking to leading experts in the field;
- connect with fellow young MPs and youth leaders, learn from diverse perspectives and coordinate your efforts; and
- become empowered to take ideas to your capitals, constituencies and those you represent by sharing knowledge, experiences and best practices.

I also want to encourage all of you to speak out freely at the Conference and on social media. Don't keep your ideas to yourselves! Let's share what we are doing with the world by communicating widely. Tell everyone why you're here. Call the media in your country and tell them about the conference. Get on Twitter and use the hashtag #youngMPs and our handle, @ipuparliament.

This Conference also marks the release of an IPU Young MPs App, which I hope will help forge a lasting digital community among you. If you have not already done so, download the App, called IPU Young MPs, from the Google and Apple App stores. You can use it to network with colleagues, interact with social media, and manage notes and documents from the conference.

Together and as young MPs, you are a powerful force. By working together, you can make a real difference in shaping the world of today and tomorrow. I urge you all to seize this opportunity to chart a new course, not only for the benefit of young people around the world, but for the future of humanity.

Your talents, enthusiasm, energy, connectivity and creativity, fill us with enormous hope.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to hearing your youth-led solutions on implementing Agenda 2030, and on leaving no one behind.

Thank you.