



HIGH-LEVEL DECLARATION

on parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and the planet

1. In August 2020, we, the Speakers of Parliament, convened for the virtual segment of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. The world was five months into a global pandemic, with over 20 million recorded cases of COVID-19 infection and at least 750,000 deaths attributed to the virus. The virtual segment resulted in a commitment to strengthen international cooperation, solidarity and multilateral action, not only to lead the world out of crisis, but also to transform it for the better and to improve resilience. By the start of September 2021, the pandemic had resulted in close to 220 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection and over 4.5 million deaths, coupled with extensive disruptions to essential health systems in several regions, underscoring the urgent need for a well-coordinated, multisectoral approach to the health emergency, ensuring surge capacity at all levels in all countries.
2. Our declaration in August 2020 underscored the critical importance of multilateralism and international solidarity in addressing the daunting socio-economic challenges of our time. As some countries finally start to emerge from the pandemic, this declaration rings truer than ever before. The very fact that we have been able to meet in person in Vienna is testimony to the significant progress that has been made through our collective efforts, in particular in terms of developing and delivering life-saving vaccines for all to ensure that no one is left behind. This Conference has granted many of us the first opportunity in over 18 months to meet in-person to share our experiences and lessons learned from the pandemic and to look forward with renewed hope to a positive recovery, founded on our shared endeavour to build back – and build forward – better.
3. The recovery must take account of the particular impact that the pandemic has had on women and girls, young and elderly people, persons with disabilities, marginalized and vulnerable populations, refugees, and communities affected by conflict. The recovery efforts must uphold the rule of law, democratic principles and universal human rights. The recovery must be inclusive, sustainable and green and must incorporate innovative solutions to the climate crisis. We must work together as one human family in facing epidemics and other crises, overcoming differences of all kinds and seeking to foster a culture of tolerance, coexistence and acceptance of the other. A renewed commitment by all parliamentarians worldwide to meaningful and effective multilateralism is critical to such a recovery.



4. We recognize that women have made a significant contribution on the front line of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, with lockdowns leaving them more vulnerable to domestic violence and increasing the burden of caring for children and the elderly. Women have also been more likely to lose employment or income as a result of the socio-economic downturn. Women and girls in conflict situations remain particularly vulnerable. All these situations have stressed the importance of putting gender equality and the empowerment of women at the heart of the COVID-19 response and recovery. We must build forward in a more gender-inclusive way and create a new global social compact for gender equality enabling the full and effective participation of women in all spheres of society. From this perspective, women must be part of the strategy and leadership of the COVID-19 recovery process, and the first step to achieving this is to ensure their equal and meaningful representation in parliaments, governments, private companies and other decision-making bodies.
5. We also acknowledge that social distancing and lockdown measures during the pandemic have had a devastating impact on youth, limiting their access to education and reducing their employment prospects, which has resulted in isolation and a surge in mental health issues. At the same time, young adults have undertaken vital front-line roles as healthcare, public utility and retail workers, as well as supporting their communities during the pandemic. We recognize these critical roles and pledge to harness the positive energy and innovativeness of young adults by making every effort to increase youth representation in our parliaments, including by joining the IPU Campaign *I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament*, which is promoting several transformative actions. We also commit to promote initiatives aimed at educating and training young people in modern information technologies, thus preparing them for the jobs of the future.
6. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a multifaceted crisis that has undermined progress in the achievement of the sustainable development goals, made States more fragile and eroded international cooperation, resulting in worldwide increases in poverty, hunger, inequality and violence. Parliaments must rise to the challenge by, first and foremost, protecting the norms and principles of peace, development, democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. We must also tap into the many benefits of inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation in order to build bridges for better understanding, so as to lay the foundation for a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world where all people can live in freedom and dignity.
7. The global economic recovery must, therefore, be inclusive, with commitments to fight poverty and lessen inequality, reduce unemployment, and improve access to education and essential services. This should nurture renewed efforts to address the root causes of conflicts and build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. As the United Nations has recognized, Parliaments have a key role to play in identifying bold and transformative actions to make the attainment of the SDGs a reality. With less than a decade to go, we commit ourselves once again to accelerating our efforts to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in our work as parliamentarians.
8. A sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will depend to a large extent on international cooperation and solidarity. Accordingly, we reiterate our support for the World Health Organization, in particular in terms of its work on research, rapid response and better pandemic preparedness through enhanced cooperation among nations. We call for strengthened international cooperation on vaccine research and development, production and distribution, and improving accessibility and affordability. In this regard, vaccines must be distributed rapidly, fairly and equitably, as well as universally. No one will be safe from COVID-19 until everyone is safe. Innovative measures, such as voluntary licensing and exchange of know-how and technology must be taken to enhance equitable access to affordable vaccines and to scale up global vaccine production and distribution in the long term. We commend the collaboration among countries, along with health organizations and manufacturers, including through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) programme. However, much remains to be done to ensure unimpeded and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all countries.

9. We urge collaboration on continued research and innovation into the treatment and elimination of COVID-19 and coronaviruses more generally, including the debilitating long-term impacts of post-COVID-19 syndrome (also known as “long COVID”). Moreover, we call for close co-operation to prepare the world for future pandemics. In this regard, it is important to work towards the establishment of a global health charter, to be agreed upon by world leaders, which guarantees health security for the world’s population, without exception, and to confront epidemics and disasters of a global nature with common universal principles and values, and in a manner that guarantees respect for human health rights.
10. The recovery of the global economy following the COVID-19 pandemic remains uncertain and unequal. Many countries will face huge budgetary deficits in the coming years and parliaments must be ready to address such challenges. We believe that a fair, open, inclusive, transparent and non-discriminatory rules-based multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core, remains a pivotal foundation for the global economy. We call for increased coordination on macro-economic policy, continued efforts to strengthen sustainable global trade and oppose protectionism and unilateralism, and robust measures to revitalize the global economy – including in terms of developing a fairer global tax system. A key component of the economic recovery will be the advancement of the digital economy. We, therefore, call for more efforts to address the digital gap and ensure fair access to technology, internet connectivity and knowledge. Parliaments should help facilitate the development of core digital infrastructure and enhance digital skills among their populations.
11. The COVID-19 pandemic must not overshadow the urgency of climate action. In order to genuinely build a better future and long-term resilience, we must achieve a green, inclusive and innovation-based growth and sustainable recovery. We remain convinced of the compelling need to tackle climate change and reiterate the critical importance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the actions and targets set out in the Paris Agreement. We welcome increased support for the Paris Agreement, in particular the return of the United States earlier this year as a party state to the Agreement. We express our strong support for an ambitious and collaborative outcome from the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow in November 2021, and stand ready to make a robust parliamentary contribution to this process.
12. We also express our deep concern about the negative impacts of the climate crisis on human health and security, such as increased food insecurity, water stress and resource scarcity arising from increasingly frequent and ever more severe weather events, all of which in turn fuel conflicts and tensions and force more people around the world to leave their homes. We stress the need for preventive strategies to mitigate climate risks and enhance resilience, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized people. We recognize the importance of preserving biodiversity and express our support for COP15 to the Convention on Biological Diversity, due to be held in Kunming, China in October 2021, under the theme of *Ecological Civilization – Building a Shared Future for all Life on Earth*.
13. The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in increasing threats to our democratic principles and institutions. In addressing the pandemic, the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government have had to take challenging decisions, notably curtailing freedom of movement, which has sometimes led to disillusionment and citizens losing trust in the political processes and in their representatives. Left unchecked, this dissonance, which is often fed by misinformation and extremist ideology, can create serious security threats to our institutions and to the physical safety of our legislators and staff. Governments should take people-centred measures, in full respect of human rights, in order to restore public trust that was eroded during the pandemic. Parliaments should serve as the centre of democratic accountability and transparency, including for COVID-19 responses, by systematically integrating public engagement into their work. This will enhance their legitimacy and the quality of parliamentary processes.
14. Parliaments have remained open for business despite restrictions on their ability to meet in person. This has led to unprecedented innovation, bringing information and communications technologies (ICT) from the back office into the very heart of parliamentary chambers, allowing remote working, remote sittings and even remote voting in many countries. We encourage

parliaments to continue to innovate and expand the use of digital technologies in order to be appropriately prepared for future emergencies, enhance access to parliaments, and ultimately increase their accountability, transparency and openness to the public.

15. While information and communications technologies have allowed the world to remain as interconnected as possible, and have contributed to enhancing prosperity, development and security at all levels, our increased use of technology carries considerable risks, exposing us to cyber-attacks and cybercrime. The internet, and in particular social media, is fertile ground for misinformation, manipulation and the dissemination of false news and disinformation, discrimination, harassment, hate speech and violence. Increased mass surveillance, undue dependence on and unregulated use of algorithms and artificial intelligence, and digital privacy are also pressing concerns.
16. All stakeholders need to observe principles, rules and norms for responsible behaviour in the ICT environment. We call on the global community to come together and establish a multilateral framework for regulating the use of digital technologies and imposing greater accountability on big tech corporations. More generally, we must work for a global consensual approach to the management of these challenges, including data security and privacy, the consequences of the use of artificial intelligence, and the ethical aspect of scientific and technological innovation, in strict compliance with our human rights obligations.
17. We strongly believe that a global community with a shared future for humankind has interwoven mutual interests and aspirations. Common challenges can only be overcome through global responses, coordination and collaboration between all our nations. We, therefore, reaffirm the key role of multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core. We also firmly support the IPU's efforts to engage and mobilize parliaments and parliamentarians around major international global processes and global commitments, thereby further strengthening the parliamentary dimension of global governance. We must continue to review, revitalize and renew multilateralism, so as to ensure that the voices of parliamentarians are heard at the United Nations and other international fora.
18. We commend the Austrian Parliament and the IPU, our global organization of national parliaments, for bringing us together for this parliamentary summit at such a historic time. We pledge to take this Declaration back to our countries and our parliaments, and to work diligently in following up on its key recommendations. We look forward to coming together again under the auspices of the IPU and in cooperation with the United Nations so as to share our experiences and report back on progress achieved.

Reservations expressed:

To paragraph 4 (gender equality) and paragraph 12 (climate change): by Turkey

To the concepts of "*people-centered measures*" (paragraph 13) and "*global community with a shared future for humankind*" (paragraph 17): by Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland