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World Conference of Speakers of Parliament: Inaugural Session - 29 July 2025

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00:00:02:12 - 00:00:05:48
Thank you so much Martin.

00:00:05:55 - 00:00:17:75
Colleagues, Much as Martin has just said a few words about Mr Michael Douglas, I am now delighted to introduce him as our keynote speaker.

00:00:18:32 - 00:00:23:19
We all know Mr Douglas is an award-winning actor and producer.

00:00:23:87 - 00:00:33:07
I am sure just as many of you are aware of his dedication to fathering and shining a light on the UNS work.

00:00:33:52 - 00:00:48:28
In his capacity as the UN Peace Messenger since 1998, Mr Douglas has given us dreams, hopes and the inspiration to always strive to do our very best.

00:00:48:84 - 00:01:02:84
He has been a tireless peace advocate for over 25 years and colleagues, it is now my privilege and honour to welcome him to address us as the keynote speaker.

00:01:03:03 - 00:01:05:35

Mr Douglas, please, you have the floor.

00:01:14:23 - 00:01:30:59
President Axon, Secretary General Chong Gong, Director General Alaboya, Ambassador Ratre, Speaker, Manicure, distinguished parliamentarians, peacemakers and public servants, thank you.

00:01:31:64 - 00:01:35:71
Thank you for your generous invitation and warm welcome.

00:01:35:71 - 00:01:42:71
But most of all, thank you for all the extraordinary work you do on behalf of our democracies.

00:01:43:64 - 00:01:48:84
Standing before you, I am truly humbled and I am grateful.

00:01:50:71 - 00:02:12:15
Now, some of you may know me as an activist, others as an actor, but 60 years ago, I was simply a student, and back then a philosopher, architect and inventor named Buckminster Fuller came to speak at my university.

00:02:13:96 - 00:02:23:15
Fuller urged us to imagine our world as a a shared vessel, Spaceship Earth.

00:02:24:31 - 00:02:25:19
He called it.

00:02:26:19 - 00:02:34:79
A fragile craft careening through the cosmos with no passengers, only crew.

00:02:35:80 - 00:02:41:96
All of us, All of humanity equally responsible for its care.

00:02:43:71 - 00:02:53:87
And Fuller believed our greatest challenges, war, inequality, environmental exploitation, weren't inevitable.

00:02:54:56 - 00:02:58:68
That we had the tools to build rather than to destroy.

00:02:59:56 - 00:03:03:75
We simply needed the willpower and one another.

00:03:06:19 - 00:03:08:39
It's easier to say that in hindsight.

00:03:08:40 - 00:03:18:00
Fuller's speech marked a turning point in my life, but I think I knew even then that his words changed something in me.

00:03:23:28 - 00:03:34:03
After graduating, I had the good fortune to travel the world as a young actor and collaborate with international casts and local crews.

00:03:34:80 - 00:03:41:76
And what struck me again and again was how similar we all were.

00:03:42:91 - 00:03:54:35
No matter what language they spoke, person they loved or God that they prayed to, everyone wanted the same things for themselves and their children.

00:03:54:75 - 00:03:59:07
Safety, opportunity and dignity.

00:04:00:71 - 00:04:08:96
And it wasn't just the people that I met that compelled me to realise Fuller's vision, it was the work itself too.

00:04:10:08 - 00:04:22:56
And in 1979 I helped make a film called The China Syndrome about a near meltdown at a nuclear power plant and the corporate cover up that followed.

00:04:23:80 - 00:04:34:19
And in a terrifying twist of fate, the movie was released 12 days before the Three Three Mile Island crisis happened.

00:04:35:92 - 00:04:56:68
It was a frightening moment and a galvanising 1, and I started reading more about the half life of plutonium and sheer and sheer scale of ballistic missiles, listening more to the experts who have long sounded the alarm about nuclear brinkmanship.

00:04:58:07 - 00:05:07:24
And it brought me to the United Nations, where in 1998 I was appointed message of a piece by Secretary General Kofi Annan.

00:05:09:07 - 00:05:19:91
And in this role, I have seen progress happen up close, not in sweeping dramatic gestures, but in small steps forward.

00:05:20:95 - 00:05:26:79
And I think about my time in the Kono Diamond district in Sierra Leone.

00:05:27:56 - 00:05:29:75
[Other language spoken]

00:05:30:68 - 00:05:36:48
And at the at that time the country was emerging from over a decade of a brutal civil war.

00:05:37:51 - 00:05:43:39
The wounds, physical, psychological, societal were still raw.

00:05:45:24 - 00:05:48:00
10s of thousands were killed or maimed.

00:05:48:00 - 00:05:55:43
Millions more were displaced as warlords battled for control of institutions and resources.

00:05:56:51 - 00:06:03:27
Over half of the rebel combatants and 1/4 of the government ones were child soldiers.

00:06:04:07 - 00:06:11:15
More than 100,000 young boys and girls, drugged, intimidated, torn from their families.

00:06:12:63 - 00:06:20:87
And yet, despite having every reason to give up on the world, the Sierra Leonean people hadn't.

00:06:22:27 - 00:06:29:11
I spoke to survivors working with local peace builders to rehabilitate former child soldiers.

00:06:30:00 - 00:06:34:19
I learned about women organising to reclaim political power.

00:06:35:07 - 00:06:45:03
I saw teachers returning to the classroom, nurses returning to clinics, civil servants returning to their communities.

00:06:46:48 - 00:07:11:72
And what made it all possible was all of you, all of us, international institutions like the UN, lending development support bodies like the IPU, helping establish democratic governance and uplift its champions, peacekeepers from around the world, civil society leaders on the ground.

00:07:13:60 - 00:07:28:64
Now, Sierra Leone is far from perfect today, but it is far freer and steadier is people more prosperous and hopeful than I could ever have imagined 23 years ago.

00:07:30:00 - 00:07:41:56
Indeed, there are so many countries and communities transformed by the work of institutions like this one, so many lives saved by our shared purpose and collective action.

00:07:43:87 - 00:07:52:36
And yet, right now, the world is more dangerous than at any point in my lifetime.

00:07:54:19 - 00:07:55:68
[Other language spoken]

00:07:56:16 - 00:08:01:04
US nonproliferation of folks have always been a quixotic bunch.

00:08:02:72 - 00:08:18:44
But today, as the Doomsday Clock ticks closer to midnight, as China Syndrome appears, less fiction, prophecy, our mission sometimes feels like a desperate hold out against the inevitable.

00:08:20:16 - 00:08:22:32
And it's not just nuclear weapons.

00:08:23:24 - 00:08:45:48
Nations are spending more and more on machines of war and less and less on the people they're purported to protect as defence budgets climb into the hundreds of 1,1,000,000 go without access to health care or child care, food in their bellies or quality education.

00:08:46:91 - 00:08:59:63
These are the true foundations of security and as a result, inequality within and between countries is an ever widening chasm.

00:09:00:79 - 00:09:05:15
Look anywhere and you see the consequences of our choices.

00:09:06:20 - 00:09:11:36
Generations trapped in cycles of violence, families ravaged by hunger.

00:09:11:91 - 00:09:16:87
The earth is so buckling under the weight of exploitation.

00:09:19:75 - 00:09:36:24
I know that many in this room entered public service to change that, but unfortunately not everyone is driven by such noble motivations, esteemed parliamentarians.

00:09:37:08 - 00:09:39:75
Greed is not good.

00:09:41:12 - 00:10:02:24
Money has corrupted politics, and now what once felt like a uniquely American problem has taken root elsewhere to story representation, fueling corruption and in our case, propping up a two party system that feels increasingly unfit to meet the moment.

00:10:04:84 - 00:10:13:48
The crisis we face are far too complex and interconnected for anyone country to take alone.

00:10:14:60 - 00:10:18:48
And that, of course, is why this body is in place in the first place.

00:10:19:48 - 00:10:37:68
It was created to invite collaboration across borders and admits political and cultural differences to remind us that compromise is the enemy is not the enemy of sovereignty, but the foundation of peace and progress.

00:10:39:03 - 00:10:50:75
The United Nations was born just a few months after I was with that same spirit, and over the years it has helped knit together a web of global organisation and norms.

00:10:53:63 - 00:10:57:39
It's easy to take our multilateral system for granted.

00:10:58:44 - 00:11:00:96
That is, until it starts to unravel.

00:11:02:87 - 00:11:11:00
Just a few years after I became a Messenger for Peace, the United States withdrew from the IPU.

00:11:12:32 - 00:11:34:72
And in the time since, we've continued to distance ourselves from the very institutions that we helped create, the UN and NATO climate treaties and arms control agreements, as well as the spirit of shared responsibility that Fuller spent his life advocating for.

00:11:36:75 - 00:11:39:15
And it's not just our foreign policy.

00:11:40:24 - 00:11:42:75
This isolation runs deeper.

00:11:43:91 - 00:11:50:79
We are more divided within our countries along political, racial and economic lines.

00:11:51:84 - 00:12:01:04
We are more lonely as individuals, flooded with digital content but starved with meaningful connection.

00:12:02:87 - 00:12:07:91
And we are more detached from the institutions that connect us.

00:12:09:55 - 00:12:16:19
For many parliaments feel distant, bureaucracies feel unaccountable.

00:12:17:60 - 00:12:21:36
[Other language spoken]

00:12:23:12 - 00:12:33:32
People don't just doubt their efficacy, they doubt their intentions, whether these bodies were built for ordinary folks in the first place.

00:12:35:51 - 00:12:44:00
And when that doubt hardens into cynicism, it opens the door to something much darker.

00:12:45:20 - 00:13:05:36
And we've seen it in a rising authoritarianism and political violence, in attacks on the Free Press and election workers, in in a politics of US versus them that punishes cooperation and demonises the most vulnerable among us.

00:13:06:63 - 00:13:15:12
And nowhere, nowhere is this crisis more vivid, more painful, than in my own country, the United

States.

00:13:16:84 - 00:13:29:84
We were once leaders on the world stage, architects of the United Nations, participants in the IPU, disciples of diplomacy and multilateralism.

00:13:31:00 - 00:13:37:67
At home, too, we believed in the promise of government to accomplish big things and protect the little guy.

00:13:38:67 - 00:13:44:63
But somehow, somehow, along the way, something broke.

00:13:46:39 - 00:14:00:63
People watched powerful interests shape laws behind closed doors while everyday problems went unaddressed, to say nothing of the urgent existential challenges that they face us all.

00:14:02:36 - 00:14:10:44
And as a result, some have chosen to check out, while others have chosen to lash out.

00:14:11:96 - 00:14:15:87
We've seen armed mobs storm our capital.

00:14:17:27 - 00:14:22:39
Public servants threatened, harassed and even killed.

00:14:23:87 - 00:14:29:32
Elections called into question because the outcome was unfavourable to one side.

00:14:31:36 - 00:14:37:72
Our institutions are in trouble, which means all of us are in trouble too.

00:14:40:55 - 00:14:41:11
And yet.

00:14:41:96 - 00:14:51:56
And yet, just as the IPU is threatened by this challenge, it was also purpose built to address it.

00:14:53:03 - 00:15:22:83
And when the ties that bind us fray, when trust and cooperation erode, that's where you come in is more than just lawmakers, your bridge builders, leaders with power to restore and restore faith in

the institutions that serve us all and remind the world that we can meet this moment if we meet it together.

00:15:24:91 - 00:15:40:55
And, and to do that, I want to return one more time to Buckminster Fuller, not to the Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth, but to another book of his called I Seem to Be a Verb.

00:15:42:44 - 00:15:47:68
And in it Fuller wrote, I live on Earth at present.

00:15:48:36 - 00:15:50:24
And I don't know what I am.

00:15:51:72 - 00:15:54:27
I know that I am not a category.

00:15:55:51 - 00:16:00:03
I am not a thing, a noun.

00:16:01:51 - 00:16:11:00
I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process, an integral function of the universe.

00:16:13:32 - 00:16:16:24
And so, my friends, this is my call to you.

00:16:17:84 - 00:16:27:75
Let us not be assistant to defend, or a relic to preserve, or a symbol to aspire to.

00:16:28:08 - 00:16:31:32
[Other language spoken]

00:16:32:51 - 00:16:35:84
And in particular, this is what I'd like you to do.

00:16:39:24 - 00:16:42:20
[Other language spoken]

00:16:43:32 - 00:16:44:92
Let us tell our story.

00:16:45:48 - 00:16:49:80

Now I know that you, what you might be thinking tell is an odd verb to begin with.

00:16:50:24 - 00:16:53:51
I mean, doesn't the story come before the telling?

00:16:54:67 - 00:16:57:47
But that distinction is part of the problem.

00:16:58:79 - 00:17:07:24
Too often we draw a false line between action and communication when the 2 are inextricably linked.

00:17:08:64 - 00:17:11:32
It's a lesson that I learned from my father.

00:17:12:79 - 00:17:16:20
He was best known for his roles on the silver screen.

00:17:17:75 - 00:17:23:48
And by the way, if he ever thought you had a lot to live up to, you try having Spartacus as your father.

00:17:25:79 - 00:17:40:31
But at the height of the Cold War, my father travelled behind the Iron Curtain with the US Information Agency and to screen his films and speak about the principles behind them.

00:17:41:07 - 00:18:00:00
Resistance to tyranny, freedom of expression, the inherent dignity of every person, the values that enabled a a poor Jewish kid, a ragged man's son from an immigrant family, to rise above his circumstances that achieved the American dream.

00:18:01:75 - 00:18:11:24
My father was a veteran and he was an activist, and he fought on the battlefield, and he testified before Congress to defend those values.

00:18:12:31 - 00:18:17:24
But some of his most impactful work happened in those screening rooms.

00:18:18:00 - 00:18:22:35
Because telling stories can change hearts and minds.

00:18:22:75 - 00:18:25:87
Telling stories can change the world.

00:18:27:40 - 00:18:33:75
Now, I'm not suggesting the IPU blockbuster, that I wouldn't be opposed to one.

00:18:34:88 - 00:18:36:48
But here's what I'm suggesting.

00:18:37:88 - 00:18:56:12
The IPU has done so much good defending the rights of persecuted MPs and promoting gender parity and legislative bodies, enabling dialogue almost amidst escalation and shepherding non proliferation and disarmament legislation through parliaments.

00:18:57:35 - 00:19:14:27
This includes production of excellent parliamentary resources like the IP US, Assuring Our Common Future, an online handbook for parliamentarians produced in cooperation with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, and PNND.

00:19:16:27 - 00:19:25:55
Now, in addition to doing that work, we also have to help people see it or even better, feel it.

00:19:26:72 - 00:19:33:60
We need to tell them stories that they understand, because that's how they'll know it's real.

00:19:33:59 - 00:19:35:95
That's how they'll know it's worth it.

00:19:36:88 - 00:19:47:52
Protecting this requires looking to new storytellers and new audiences to connect with.

00:19:48:96 - 00:19:53:55
And that brings me to our our second verb expand.

00:19:54:48 - 00:20:01:88
Expand our movement for people to trust institutions like this one.

00:20:02:64 - 00:20:14:12
Institutions like this one need to trust the people to treat them not only as voters to be courted or worse, roadblocks to an anti democratic agenda.

00:20:15:20 - 00:20:18:16
But as change makers in their own right.

00:20:19:48 - 00:20:22:16
[Other language spoken]

00:20:22:83 - 00:20:29:39
Allow the world to step in, or better yet, allow yourselves to step out into that world.

00:20:29:92 - 00:20:38:27
Close the distance, literal and symbolic, between those who write the laws and those whose lives are touched by them.

00:20:39:68 - 00:20:44:88
Encourage people not just to observe the work but to shape it.

00:20:45:68 - 00:21:00:00
That especially goes for those at the margins the the women, people of colour, religious minorities, LGBTQ plus people and young people who have for too long been absent from decision making.

00:21:02:88 - 00:21:25:32
One of the most powerful ways that we can do that is invest in local government, the school boards and city councils and zoning commissions that determine what our children learn, how our neighbourhoods grow, and whether democracy is something people feel in their daily lives.

00:21:26:27 - 00:21:35:92
And more than that, local government is where people hone their leadership, learn their values and earn the trust of their neighbours.

00:21:36:20 - 00:21:57:03
And so when we expand our institutions, expand our thinking to empower these leaders, especially young leaders, we're not only building stronger communities, we're building a pipeline of talented public servants for national office, too.

00:21:59:07 - 00:22:04:91
I think of my son Dylan, who serves in local government in New York.

00:22:05:00 - 00:22:05:83
[Other language spoken]

00:22:06:51 - 00:22:23:68

He's about 50 years younger than his colleagues, but his youth endows him with that that powerful combination of optimism and pragmatism, the ability to see what others may not see, who others may not.

00:22:24:79 - 00:22:37:55
It's just spirit found in young people across the globe, activists, civil servants, community organisers who refuse to sit down and wait their turn.

00:22:39:44 - 00:22:50:24
These leaders are closer to the to the ground, to the people they serve, less beholden to big money or partisan politics.

00:22:50:64 - 00:22:54:92
And so expanding to include them is the floor.

00:22:56:00 - 00:23:03:48
And we must trust them to bring us into the future and empower them to build a better one for us all.

00:23:06:64 - 00:23:14:20
There's one last verb I have for you, and it's quite simply to hope.

00:23:15:55 - 00:23:20:59
I'm not talking about wishful thinking or willful ignorance.

00:23:22:20 - 00:23:29:84
The idea that if we stop talking about nukes, they'll go away if we turn a blind eye to dark money doesn't exist.

00:23:31:48 - 00:23:32:68
[Other language spoken]

00:23:33:55 - 00:23:41:03
Hope is facing hard truths with clear eyes and believing we can make a difference anyway.

00:23:42:83 - 00:23:46:48
It's planting seeds of peace and prosperity.

00:23:46:92 - 00:23:58:56
Even if we're unsure, We'll live to see them blossom and trusting that that next generation will tend them, help them take root and grow.

00:24:00:83 - 00:24:14:91
I've been involved in nuclear non proliferation for more than half of my life, and I'll admit when I first started I thought someday I'll see a world free of nuclear weapons.

00:24:16:51 - 00:24:18:16
I don't think that anymore.

00:24:18:92 - 00:24:23:00
But I still believe this is a cause it's worth fighting for.

00:24:23:88 - 00:24:25:72
And that hope isn't naive.

00:24:26:92 - 00:24:28:20
It's necessary.

00:24:29:59 - 00:24:46:11
Because without it, without hope, in the face of overwhelming odds, we wouldn't see new treaties written, old arsenals destroyed, and critical bodies like PNND formed.

00:24:47:35 - 00:24:53:35
We wouldn't see young people dreaming, marching, campaigning for a safer world.

00:24:53:68 - 00:25:01:64
We wouldn't see folks of every political stripe coming together to say that a nuclear war must never, ever be fought.

00:25:01:64 - 00:25:13:80
A few months ago I I visited Kiev and by then Ukraine had been fighting for survival for over 2 1/2 years.

00:25:14:07 - 00:25:26:87
Thousands had died, millions more had been displaced, and the prospects of a just and lasting peace had to me, all but disappointed, disappeared.

00:25:28:20 - 00:25:34:88
And yet, speaking with people on the ground, I was struck by something unexpected.

00:25:35:92 - 00:25:41:24
Radical optimism, especially around nuclear weapons.

00:25:42:00 - 00:25:53:00
The hard earned belief that the devastation of this war might be a wake up call, prompting the world to finally confront the dangers of armament.

00:25:54:55 - 00:26:02:31
And when your faith is in short supply, look to those dreamers to progress and those that make it possible.

00:26:03:40 - 00:26:25:40
But most of all, look to one another, to leaders willing to choose compromise over ego, to parliaments that act as lighthouses amidst The Tempest of authoritarianism, to legislative bodies struggling towards inclusive democracy but refusing to give up.

00:26:27:55 - 00:26:39:75
And to the parliamentarians not just in here but out there, linking arms with the people in the fight against cruelty, against corruption, against kings.

00:26:41:96 - 00:26:55:27
Esteemed parliamentarians, we live on a tiny, miraculous, terrifyingly fragile marble of a planet.

00:26:56:64 - 00:26:57:75
It's all we have.

00:26:59:03 - 00:27:01:03
We are all we have.

00:27:03:03 - 00:27:04:48
But I believe that's enough.

00:27:05:83 - 00:27:21:67
I believe we can issue a Clarion call to action, the one I received as a student captivated by a man who taught us all to be verbs, evolutionary processes, integral functions of the universe.

00:27:23:16 - 00:27:34:12
I believe we can deliver a positive vision for the future like the one I absorbed almost through osmosis growing up in parallel with the United Nations.

00:27:35:40 - 00:27:44:84
I believe we can reach out and bring in those at the margins who have the capacity to make a difference and just need the opportunity to try.

00:27:46:00 - 00:28:10:83
And I believe we can plant the seeds of a future where might is not measured in missiles, but in the strength of institutions that deliver justice, freedom and opportunity in democracies free of corruption, societies free of want, and the next generation free of fear.

00:28:12:20 - 00:28:22:40
So let us be verbs, let us tell our story, expand our movement, and hope that together we can create that future.

00:28:23:96 - 00:28:25:79
There is not a moment to lose.

00:28:26:75 - 00:28:27:64
Thank you very much.