



**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**Hon. Advocate J. F. Mudenda  
Speaker of the National Assembly**

**ON**

*"Rejuvenating Democracy, Giving Voice to the Youth"*

**AT**

**The 134<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union  
19 to 23 March, 2016  
Lusaka, Zambia**

## **Mr. President**

At the onset, I wish to convey to this distinguished Assembly, warm and fraternal greetings from the Parliament of the Republic of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, may I extend, on behalf of the Zimbabwe delegation and indeed on my own behalf our sincere gratitude to the Government of Zambia and the Parliament of Zambia for the excellent protocol and hospitality arrangements put in place for this Assembly. Zambia, you have done SADC and Africa proud indeed. Congratulations.

This year's IPU Assembly theme, namely, **"Rejuvenating Democracy, Giving Voice to the Youth"**, is both critical and strategic as it calls for pragmatic action to uplift and create qualitative life among the youth. According to the UNDP 2012 publication, *Enhancing Youth Political Participation*, young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world's population. Yet they have limited influence in national political institutions, let alone in the economic sphere. It is in this context that the great thinker and proponent of human liberation, Frantz Fanon: **(in his book: The Wretched of the Earth)** fully captures our collective thought in his seminal statement which affirms that, *"Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it."* From this eloquent statement arises these important observations:

- Firstly, all our countries should avoid relegating the youth to a position of obscurity;
- Secondly, our youth must be encouraged to define its own unique and branded footprint of development in our societies; and
- Thirdly, the youth will have betrayed the mission of its generation to be what it ought to be in the scale of self-actualisation if it fails to come up with requisite programmes of action driven by the youth themselves.

**Mr. President,**

I would, therefore, like to suggest that for this Assembly to discharge its responsibilities in rejuvenating democracy and providing a voice for the youth, it must ask itself and answer these critical questions:

- Firstly, does the space exist for the youth to play a participatory key role in the national development agenda in a robust manner?
- Secondly, is our youth positioned to discover its mission and walk through that missionary endeavour towards self-actualisation?
- Thirdly, is it possible for our youth to discover this mission and act to fulfil it in its road to self-discovery and personal development?

The answers lie in creating an enabling legislative, policy, financing, education and training frameworks that are

conducive to the substantial contribution of young people to democratic governance and related institutions. More importantly, for society to respond positively to the vibrant aspirations of the youth, society must listen attentively to the voice of the youth at all times.

**Mr. President,**

The major challenges facing the youth in Zimbabwe include underemployment and unemployment which stands at 84%. Furthermore, young people in Zimbabwe are not fully engaged in formal political processes, including voting during elections. They must register as voters and stand for elective positions. Any form of disengagement limits the potential for the youth to be heard, to be elected into office within political parties so that they are able to build the necessary internal power base to influence the body polity. Consequently, all the major political parties in Zimbabwe have vibrant Youth Wings that have served as a mentoring ground for their current and future leadership roles in their respective parties and ultimately in our nation. That is why the Constitution of Zimbabwe, in Section 20, provides a youth friendly legal framework which promotes youth political and socio-economic participation in our country. In compliance with that Constitutional provision, the Zimbabwe Government has a fully fledged Ministry of Youth Affairs that drives the youth socio-economic development agenda. That Ministry has crafted a National Youth Policy which has generated several

youth empowerment programmes buttressed by a US\$10 million Revolving Fund.

**Mr. President,**

Young Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe Chair some Portfolio Committees and six have been appointed to Ministerial positions. Additionally, we have sessions of Child Parliamentarians which are annually staged in the National Assembly.

**Mr President,**

Let me conclude by affirming that what is required is action and more action to ensure that our youths benefit from the various policies and programmes propagated by our governments. As the late 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy (1960) rightly stated:

*“There are risks and costs to a programme of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”*

Our youth must, therefore, be allowed to exploit their vibrant energies into action and blossom into rejuvenating democracy. Giving voice to the youth is to get them out of the comfort zone of *“comfortable inaction”*.

**I thank you.**