

**Remarks by Brendan Howlin  
President A.E.P.I.**

**At the opening of interparliamentary seminar on democratic  
governance and electoral integrity in the East African community.  
Kampala, Uganda. 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2025.**

Mr. Speaker, distinguished guests, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, I wish to express my sincere thanks to our hosts here in the Parliament of Uganda for their warm welcome and support for this Interparliamentary initiative.

I am most grateful also to the speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly and his dedicated staff for their hard work and endeavours. We have collectively worked for some time to make this important seminar a reality.

The next two days provide not only an opportunity for Parliamentarians from the E.A.L.A. Nations to address topics of critical interest and importance; it also rekindles old friendships and partnerships between E.A.L.A. and European Parliamentarians.

I am honoured to address you today as the President of A.E.P.I. (The African - European Parliamentary Initiative). Some of you will remember our predecessor organisation AWEPA which had a long and mutually valued relationship with this distinguished assembly. Together we organised a series of Inter-Parliamentary seminars for the decade between 2006 and 2016. These so-called Nanyuki seminars (after the site of the first seminar in Nanyuki, Kenya), were widely regarded as valuable and important to all members, providing a forum to debate matters of critical importance to the region and generating collaborative solutions.

This week we begin to renew that African/European political cooperation. It is our hope that the positivity and active engagement that characterised the old Nanyuki conference series will be reignited to achieve constructive goals, and strengthen mutual understanding of challenging issues. From A.E.P.'s perspective it is our wish to once again be regarded as trusted friends and supporters of the dynamism that is now so evident in African political discourse.

As a person who served four decades in Parliament in Ireland, I am very aware that this seminar is taking place in a very challenging world. Norms that have been established for decades are being swept away and many nations on every continent, are struggling to adjust to new realities on trade, security, migration, energy and so much more.

There is little doubt that many established norms need to change.

I was greatly taken by the remarks made last week by President Stubb of Finland. Speaking at the G20 meeting in South Africa, he set out his central point – the difference between multilateralism and multipolarity. President Stubb described multilateralism as a system based on cooperation, rules, norms and trusted institutions. In contrast, he expressed concern about a world moving towards multipolarity, where power is distributed among multiple nation states but where interactions become transactional, and deal based.

President Stubb expressed the fear that the move away from an international order based on rules, is more prone to conflict.

His central message, I believe, is that the global institutions established after World War II need urgent reform to reflect the geopolitical realities of today, but not simply to be swept away.

The Western Nations need to recognise that current institutions are outdated and unfair, and must support re-distributing power within

the institutions to better represent the current global demographic and economic landscape.

The role of Africa in this debate is critical. With its growing population and increasing economic capacity it will play and even more important role in world affairs.

Many years ago, former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger asked “who do I call if I want to call Europe?”. Europe took that question very seriously and have worked very hard to provide an answer. It was clear to Europeans that within the European Union there can't be 27 phone numbers given and 27 views expressed. The efforts to better coordinate a single European voice on international matters has certainly not been entirely successful, as views on conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine show; but for many issues now there is a common European perspective.

I'm not sure if anyone has asked the same question about a united voice for Africa. But the nations working together here in E.A.L.A are shaping common positions on the evolving issues for this part of Africa.

The themes selected for these two days of discussion examining the regional political landscape here; looking to integration in the East African Community and on Friday the critical matter of safeguarding democracy and electoral integrity. These are issues that every Nation on every continent is currently addressing. I certainly eagerly look forward to hearing the considered views of EALA members to these issues of our time.

Preserving democracy, freedom of speech, accountable leadership and working Parliaments is our common goal. There is of course no one single model or perfect system of democracy. Our traditions, our history and our lived experiences shape each nations approach.

But the values are universal.

As a social democrat, F.D Roosevelt was one of my political heroes, but his wife Eleanor is sometimes overlooked.

Eleanor said “Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer. We must not let that happen here”.

She was of course talking in the context of the 1930s when extremism was the norm in European politics, and Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin were transforming their countries into dictatorships.

In her own USA at that time, the K.K.K. was rampant and discrimination on the basis of race was institutionalised in the laws of many states.

The formal legal code of racism that we know as apartheid was yet to be instituted in South Africa; – that came in 1948.

Africa still lives with the legacy of colonialism. As an Irish man I understand the indelible marks made by history.

As the philosopher George Santayana said “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.

But remembering the past doesn't mean we can or should live in it. Our task is to shape the future.

There is a new optimism in Africa today. It is for parliamentarians working together to make that optimism a reality.

It is our hope and desire that cooperation between Parliaments and Parliamentarians in Africa and Europe will aid that important objective.

