

SPEECH
BY H.E. MRS. NGUYEN THI KIM NGAN,
PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 137TH ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY UNION
(St. Petersburg, 15 October 2017)

“Promoting Cultural Pluralism and Peace through Inter-faith and Inter-ethnic Dialogue”

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, IPU President,
Mr Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General,
Mr....., President of the 137th IPU General Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of the National Assembly of Viet Nam, I wish to extend my warmest greetings to Mr. Saber Chowdhury, IPU President, Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General and all distinguished delegates. I also would like to thank Madam Valentina Ivanovna Matviyenko, Chairwoman of the Federation Council and His Excellency Mr. Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma for your warm reception extended to our delegation since our arrival in St. Petersburg, an economic, cultural and scientific hub known for its ancient and splendid architecture. We are convinced that with the experience in organizing important international and regional conferences of the Federation Council and the State Duma, the 137th IPU General Assembly will be crowned with great success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world we live in today is witnessing many complex uncertainties, which represent a threat to peace, independence, cooperation and sustainable development of all nations. On the one hand, we rejoice to see the tremendous advances in science and technology that propelled mankind to new heights of civilization and knowledge and brought different political regimes, economies, societies, cultures and religions closer together to co-exist in harmony for mutual development. On the other hand, apart from many non-traditional security challenges, newly emerging problems such as the lack of tolerance and

understanding, boycott and discrimination against what is different are representing a severe challenge, exacerbating separatist terrorism, nationalism and extremism, escalating conflicts in many hot spots, deepening economic and social inequalities and threatening international peace and security. With that in mind, I am of the view that peace among nations depends heavily on candid dialogue, mutual respect and mutual understanding, and religious and ethnic tolerance. Only by adhering to these principles can we prevent extremism, violence and xenophobia which stand as one of the factors to weaken human interaction, jeopardize cultural values and civilizations that have existed for thousands of years. Cultural pluralism, inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue will continue to be a strong driver for development and change and the fundamental ground for us to work together to build a better world.

In that spirit, I highly value the theme of the 137th IPU General Assembly and the remarks made by previous delegates. IPU adopted the Quebec City Declaration on Citizenship, Identity and Linguistic and Cultural Diversity In A Globalized World in 2012. This document is conducive to the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Through out the history of national building and development, different ethnicities and religions in Viet Nam have been co-existing in harmony, enjoying mutual development while maintaining their unique cultures, languages and faiths. Currently, 95% of the Vietnamese population practice religions and beliefs, of whom 25 million are religious followers. The 54 ethnic groups have created rich cultural and social diversity in Viet Nam, and always uphold the tradition of solidarity and mutual support for joint development. The State of Viet Nam dedicates different preferential policies to ethnic minorities to enable them to prosper and narrow the development gap with other groups. As Viet Nam is extensively integrating itself into the world, religious organizations in our country have been expanding relations with other religions and religious organizations all over the world. Various international religious events have been convened in Viet Nam including the Vesak Grand Celebrations (2008,2014), the 11th International Association of Buddhist Women (2009), the 10th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (2012). This has facilitated exchange

and dialogue among practitioners of different religions and religious organizations.

On its part, the National Assembly of Viet Nam adopted the 2013 Constitution which lays emphasis on ethnic and religious affairs. The 2013 Constitution reaffirms that Viet Nam is a unified country where different ethnicities co-exist in harmony, enjoy equality, unity, mutual respect and mutual support for joint development, all acts of ethnic discrimination and division are strictly prohibited. The State of Viet Nam pursues the policy of all round development in which ethnic minorities are given favorable conditions to bring to full play their strength and prosper along with the national development process.

To institutionalize the Constitution, the National Assembly adopted the Law on Belief and Religion in 2016, regularly monitors the Government's implementation of important policies to ensure the right to participate in lawful activities of all citizens, regardless of their religions and ethnicities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To promote cultural pluralism and peace through dialogue, I would like to make some proposals as follows:

First, IPU should continue raising its voice to encourage member parliaments to bring into full play their roles in law making and improving legal frameworks to ensure the peaceful co-existence between cultures and ethnic groups; monitor the Governments' implementation of policies aimed at protecting the people's interests, ensuring fair and equal treatment to people from all walks of life, ethnic groups, religions and cultures, thus helping foster national unity.

Second, it is essential to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation between countries and parliaments in cultural, religious, ethnic affairs; advance the joint implementation of projects and activities aimed at raising the awareness of the importance of multi-culture dialogue across the world; increase mutual understanding and the awareness on the importance of this issue to peace and cooperation for the sustainable development and prosperity of all people.

Third, at the national level, despite different political regimes, all countries share an interest in pursuing policies that are people-centered and people-oriented. Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate discriminatory laws and regulations in order to

ensure the full participation of people from all walks of life in the country's political, social and economic life.

Forth, we should encourage IPU member countries to develop a set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and legislations regarding different ethnicities and religious groups to ensure equality and fairness for all.

Fifth, it is important to strengthen cooperation between IPU and UN agencies, international organizations and all member parliaments in order to support initiatives and actions by legislators for the purpose of peace, concord and friendship between ethnicities, religions and cultures within or among nations.

Sixth, communication and awareness raising on the rights and responsibilities of each individual should be enhanced with a view to promote benevolence, mutual support and sharing among people.

Thank you for your attention./.