

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen.

People, goods and ideas cross national boundaries at an increasing pace. This means that we interact increasingly with cultural diversity surrounding us.

There is great richness and opportunity in that diversity, but also new questions that need to be answered. Climate change, increasing migration flows and population growth will no longer bow to the borders of any one society, region or culture.

The resolution of these challenges will require extensive international cooperation and everybody's involvement. The importance of people from different cultures to come together and meet harmoniously and in mutual respect should be evident to all. To quote the poet Jaan Kaplinski, there is "the same sea in all of us": though we may be different in our values and ideals, we still share our common humanity.

Nevertheless, the string of tragic events that have shaken the globe have painfully shown how difficult the dialogue between cultures and civilizations at times has been. The attacks in many places tell the sad tale of religion and culture being subverted to incite radicalization, extremism and terror.

We cannot let violent extremists take our way of life hostage. That is, the way of life respecting universal human rights, rule of law, democracy, freedom of speech and equal opportunities for all, not forgetting the rights of minorities and support for those who are the most vulnerable in our societies.

Esteemed colleagues,

There is an evident need for mediation, paving the way for long-term peace and stable societies.

Finland has been active in promoting inter-faith dialogue, which we consider to be one of the key elements in mediation. By enhancing the inter-faith dialogue and interaction, we strengthen our mutual understanding of different religions and cultures and their influence within societies. In essence, religions should be used to building bridges rather than destroying them.

This dialogue can only be realized on the basis of inclusiveness, fundamental to the values of democracy, human rights, pluralism, tolerance and rule of law. I should like to pay special attention to the paramount role women play in this regard. Cultural diversity can only flourish when individuals are considered to be of equal value, have equal rights and chances to be active citizens in all walks of life.

One should not undermine the importance of involving different generations; you should be heard whether you are young or old. No one ought to be deprived from the right to participate in the making of decisions that affect him or her. Here I welcome the IPU's continued role to be the beacon that leads the way in demonstrating best practices and creating a forum for us parliamentarians for a positive peer review.

Education is the key. It allows the development of critical thinking and innovation. Similarly, education is a way to increased opportunities and to social progress, both for the individual and the society at large.

By providing education to all, whether they are rich or poor; male or female; regardless of the color of their skin or their confession, the society contributes towards an active and skilled citizen-body, ready to contribute.

Finally, as representatives of the people, we parliamentarians carry a responsibility in allowing and ensuring a respectful exchange of diverse views. The example we choose to set in the way we speak and present ourselves is crucial. I want to mention one example from the Parliament of Finland: all the political groups represented in the Finnish parliament have come together to condemn all hate speech and all racism, and to reaffirm their commitment to the rule of law.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are facing a time of formidable challenges to the democratic, pluralistic form of governance. I hope that the important discussion here will encourage and inspire concrete action towards a better society. Author Alberto Moravia once wrote that “only an artist may search for perfection, and a politician must be content with the possible.” I would like to think that you can find perfection in the possible too. Something like this can happen when we reach mutual understanding through dialogue.