



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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## Speaking notes

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General Debate on  
*Promoting cultural pluralism  
and peace through inter-faith  
and inter-ethnic dialogue*  
137<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related  
meetings  
Saint Petersburg, 15 October 2017

Mr. President,  
Ms. Matvienko, Chairperson of the Council of the Federation and President of  
the 137<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Ms. Osuru, President of the Forum of Young MPs of the IPU,  
Ms. Rita Itsák-Ndiaye, Member of the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial  
Discrimination,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to debate inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue.

Dialogue is a word that perfectly defines what the IPU stands for. It is the  
quintessence of democracy and a pathway to peace. A true dialogue  
acknowledges all differences in order to find a common ground.

**Colleagues, for any dialogue to be genuine, it must be inclusive.** There  
can be no dialogue if half of the community, if half of humanity, is left aside.  
And yet, all too often, those who sit at the negotiating table are all men.

Let us accept no more excuses to that. We know that peace can only be  
sustained if women are engaged in every step of the way. And we have a legal  
framework to make that possible – UN Security Council resolution 1325.

1325 is extremely relevant to the work that we do as parliamentarians and it is  
within reach. 1325 is about engaging women, all women, including women at  
the grassroots and at the frontlines, and hearing what they have to say. What  
they have to tell us is of incredible importance, especially when it comes to  
building peace, understanding and resilience in our societies. 1325 is also  
about doing all it takes to empower women in all areas.

**This brings me to my second point: the agenda for inter-faith and inter-  
ethnic dialogue must be an agenda for gender equality.** All representatives  
of ethnic or religious groups must uphold the principle of equality.

Equality and women's human rights are non-negotiable. They are our shield  
against intolerance and extremism. They are what make our communities, our  
nations and the world advance. Respect for gender equality is at the very

basis of respect for diversity. If we forget that, we lose sight of our goal of achieving social cohesion, understanding beyond differences and peace.

**My third and related point is that cultural pluralism presupposes respect for the individual.**

We must embrace diversity within our own cultures and acknowledge the diversity among women. There is no such thing as the woman. We are diverse and our differences should be taken into account within our community and within society at large. In particular, minority women are often the target of hatred and stigma. That is why it is so important for them to have a say at the dialogue table, claim their rights and contribute their unique perspective towards achieving peace and understanding.

Let me conclude by calling on this Assembly to place gender equality at the heart of peace efforts. And affirm that respect for women's rights and the inclusion of women must be preconditions to any form of dialogue.

We must hear what women have to say about their own culture and religion. We must treasure what makes our cultures so unique and so diverse at the same time. Let us not forget that women are an essential element and vehicle of cultural pluralism and peace.