

**Address of Mr Gundars Daudze,
Head of the Latvian National Group to IPU
at the General Debate on**

**Contemporary challenges to democracy: Overcoming division
and building community.**

Ladies and Gentlemen!
Dear Colleagues!

Just a few days ago the world marked UNESCO International Tolerance Day, which was aimed to strengthening tolerance by promoting mutual understanding between cultures and peoples.

And what does the word "tolerance" mean?

A fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those opinions, beliefs, practices, cultures, racial or ethnic origins which differ from my own, it means - freedom from bigotry.

Let's give a chance to diplomacy and democracy!

Recently on its 75th anniversary, UNESCO acknowledged that the vision of its founding fathers has become even more relevant today, when the world needs solidarity more than ever before.

And not only UNESCO. Many of the international organisations have already adopted or are in the process of adopting new strategies.

And it is necessary because we have to realize that not only people but also the world has changed.

United Nations and its entities, World Health Organisation. World Trade Organisation, Interparliamentary Union and others work to make sure that their new strategies will demonstrate the ability and willingness to respond to global environmental, economic health and societal challenges, will pay special attention to inclusive and equitable education, cultural diversity and open society, media and information literacy, a science that promotes peace in people's minds and in the world.

Today we have to honestly admit that in recent decades there have been many challenges that have shaken our world. I will mention a few - climate change and the disasters they causes, population growth and food security, intolerance and related violence, mental health and access to medicine in general, arms race, migration problems and gender inequality. And everywhere popular social networks, whose information most people believe in without evaluation.

And the latest challenge - a world pandemic with the huge numbers of victims and disrupted global trade and economic networks.

Is all this not a sufficient threat to humanity and democracy?

Is it still necessary to try to convince one another about the superiority of one's culture, faith, religion over others, often from the positions of power?

In this context, the international community is stepping up its initiatives to return to a normal life.

And parliamentarians must be at the forefront of this process in order to provide stable solutions for a lasting improvement in the current situation.

Science also should play a more important role in diplomacy with a view to strengthening democracy. Scientists can explain how and why people are overwhelmed by different feelings, why their interpretation of the facts depends on a number of factors, such as cultural beliefs or thinking habits. And if national interests explain most of the conflicts, we can find the ways how to manage them.

The scientific approach can make a significant contribution to diplomatic language, because science doesn't belong to one culture or people in particular and it is based solely on recognition and analysis of the facts.

The human approach must be able to agree on, even if you have to make concessions, because next time someone might make concessions to you.

For example - at the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow (COP26) no maximum agreement was reached on the elimination of fossil fuels, but still an agreement was signed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, which is still a goal.

There are four seasons in my country, Latvia. In autumn we can see the trees with colorful leaves in the landscape. They are beautiful in their diversity, the more colors together - the richer view.

There are people of different cultures and religions living in my country, Latvia. When they get together, are interesting, maybe sometimes loud, but complementary, enriching.

And my question is, at what point does disrespect, mistrust, even hatred and violence begin?

Who is to blame and what to do?

Maybe people need to learn from the trees?

Just to be and evolve side by side. And when you are beautifying yourself, try to highlight the beauty of the others.

Just to be complementary in the diversity.

Thank you for your attention!