

Statement by the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan

For the General Debate on the Theme “Contemporary challenges to
democracy: Overcoming Division and Building Community”

Mr. President,

Distinguished Parliamentarians

and Excellencies,

It is a great honour for me to be among such an august gathering.

Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President and the Vice Presidents for their election. We are confident that you will steer this session skilfully.

I thank the Parliament of Spain for hosting this Session. I also commend the IPU Secretariat for the excellent arrangements made, despite the COVID-19 related disruptions.

The topic of the Conference is very important for us as it resonates with the many of the contemporary challenges, including those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. President,

A quick scan of the global landscape reveals three clear signs of democratic progress.

One, today's globalized world has increasingly embraced democratic values and principles. All States, irrespective of their size and power, enjoy the right of sovereign equality in the global governance system. Dialogue, consensus-building and cooperation are essential ingredients of our multilateral work and responses to an array of global challenges.

Two, promoting welfare and protecting rights of human beings remain the *raison d'être* of political dispensations. Today, governments 'of the people' exist 'for the people' and 'by the people'.

Three, in today's digital era, citizens have become immensely empowered. New and emerging technologies have unlocked access to a wealth of information, promoted transparency, and opened new avenues of civic participation.

Mr. President,

These encouraging trends have highlighted new challenges.

In this regard, I would like to highlight three specific challenges:

First, the global surge in populism threatens to submerge the core tenets of democracy. Hate-based ideologies have fragmented societies, and made intolerance tolerant. Disturbingly, populist leaders are dividing people to multiply votes through spreading misinformation and disinformation. This abuse of electoral processes, and attack on human dignity is a huge disservice to the very idea of democracy.

Second, we are far from attaining a rules-based, democratic international order. Centres of privileges regrettably exist. Might is Right. Powerful States remain shielded from global accountability.

This widening gap between principles and practices resonates with the plight of the brave Kashmiri people. Since 05th August 2019, India, the occupying Power, has imposed, through use of brute force, a range of illegal and unilateral measures upon Kashmiris. These measures are designed to alter demography of the UN-recognized disputed territory. These measures are a clear contravention of the fundamental principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Yet, in deference to their political and economic interests, many global champions of democracy and human rights are silent. This must end to enable the Kashmiris to exercise their democratic right to determine their future in line with UN resolutions.

Third, the international community is living through a 'winter of discontent' due to an unfair global economic system. The rich are getting richer, and the poor poorer. The COVID pandemic has further brought to surface the growing structural inequalities between developed and developing States. Regrettably, the global North has opted for a

self-interested approach. An example of which can be witnessed in the outspread of a new COVID-19 variant in South Africa.

Mr. President

As a political worker and activist, I am a firm believer that the best anti-dote to our problems is more democracy. In order to overcome the multitude of contemporary challenges-some of which I outlined above; we need to act at three levels:

First: at the individual level. A democracy is as strong as its citizens are. We, therefore, need to invest more in educating and empowering our people.

Second: at the domestic level. We should continue our work on legal, administrative and policy reforms in order to strengthen our political systems, combat corruption, increase civic participation, and optimize public service delivery.

Finally: at the international level. There is an urgent need to reform the global governance system. As exposed by the COVID pandemic, business as usual is not a very attractive proposition.

Pakistan fully recognizes the UN's central role in promoting a democratic and rules-based international order, and calls for revitalizing the UN

General Assembly- the ‘World’s Parliament’-as the main forum to discuss and resolve global problems.

We also believe that respect and adherence to the principles of UN Charter such as sovereign equality of states, pacific settlement of disputes, refraining from the threat or use of force, non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect for the right of peoples to self-determination – are critical to strengthening democratic values and principles at the international level.

Mr. President,

We hope that our deliberations at this Assembly contribute to action-oriented outcomes that meet democratic aspirations of our people and strengthen the principles of democracy nationally and internationally.

I thank you.