

Contribution on the occasion of the General Debate of the 143rd IPU Assembly by Parliamentarian of Suriname Asiskumar Gajadien, Madrid - Spain, 26-30 November 2021

Mr. President/ Madam Chair:

Thank you for giving me the floor.

First of all, I would like to express my delegation's deepest sympathy for the victims in today's world due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dear friends, as we all know, no country is left out from this pandemic. It is a challenge to all of us to fight this virus and ensure our healthcare.

I also would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the people and Parliament of Spain and the IPU for hosting this in-person meeting in Madrid, under challenging circumstances.

We are also thankful for the opportunity to make a contribution on this very important topic, concerning how political systems and parliamentarians can promote a culture of cooperation and political dialogue to overcome divides and build inclusive societies in today's world.

We concur with this forum to underline the importance of this topic amidst eroding public trust in political systems, growing polarisation and the spread of disinformation through social media.

Let me present an overview on how we in the diverse, peaceful and colourful Republic of Suriname in South America, deal with this issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my dear friends,

There can be many reasons for polarisations. Some of them are the following:

- Social economic status
- The unknown leads to not being appreciated
- Manipulation
- Backlog of certain groups
- Division based on: gender, race, religion, age, sex orientation.

Systems which can stimulate the above points are political parties, traditional media, social media, bloggers, bloggers, activists and others.

As mentioned before, improvement of social-economic status, offering equal opportunities in policy making with a general political goal, amending the

Constitution with non-dominance guarantees and attention for strategic groupings are key elements to prevent polarisation.

It is therefore necessary to build and create consultation platforms with certain groups through existing structures, e.g. the district council and jurisdiction council members of the residential areas.

Furthermore, influencing society by introducing peer groups and setting up a Learning Group at the University that looks into this phenomenon of Polarisation.

There should be also improving of the social media awareness sessions or broadcasting via the national channels e.g. social media groups for children and youth, essay competitions and introducing of a day of Unity at least once a year.

Finally, awards in the form of money and prizes should be given to persons for promoting non-polarising platforms.

One of the most important tasks of politics is to improve the dialogue system to strengthening the governing body. In our system of multi ethnic parties we have made an effort to improve this, to give a better performance.

This growth of our multi-ethnic and multicultural society could be rendered for providing a model.

Political parties have an important role in this by presenting a plan for growth and progress for each member and stimulate consultation between parties.

Involvement of society in the composition and implementation of party programs, so that the unity and nation-building according to the intention of the constitution as a democratic constitutional state, is observed.

Not only the people are involved, but all stakeholders, such as business and international organisations are involved to engage more meaningfully in turning ideas into legislative products and implementing policy.

It's all about strengthening the sense of democracy in society by providing information and awareness sessions through the website, own parliamentary TV, Radio, Social Media, schools on how to eliminate divisions and how to deal with differences of opinion.

Within the principles of Good Governance, reflecting the international and national rules governing the aspirations of the people, the aim is to expressing their role as representatives of the people.

Parliaments develop on the basis of what their society demands, in addition to international rules, treaties, etc.

Parliaments, they work to strengthen international relations with other parliaments of friendly countries, through exchange programmes, conferences where extensive political dialogue is conducted and concrete actions are taken on various social issues that arise in the world. It is Parliaments that play an important role in shaping foreign policy.

It is for this reason that the Parliament of Suriname is looking into the possibilities of setting up a scientific research institute that, together with our International Relations department, can develop our Parliament in further strengthening democracy.

Since it is Parliaments that must study the approval of legislation, linked to international events, and how countries implement it, it is an important condition that the laws must be clear and enforceable.

With regard to hate speech, Suriname has included a number of rules in the penal code in which in the event of defamation and slander, any person affected by this, can file a report at the justice department.

Insults against the Head of State/Acting Head of State is also specifically included in the law. A number of laws have also been approved in Parliament, including the Act on electronic legal transaction that protects society against acts that not only take place via the Internet, but in general all legal acts and acts where electronic applications have been used.

Furthermore, it is necessary to work and observe how free speech is experienced within the government and other institutes and organisations. As stated in the Constitution, free speech is one of the fundamental human rights with the understanding that the integrity of the person(s) or groups about whom an opinion is expressed does not constitute libel and slander.

The constitution art. 19 provides protection against free speech, however awareness, compliance, protection, security and control are equally important.

Women are encouraged to be part of the decision-making process. Parliament can deal with this issue on a better level when the quota legislation is passed for the gender equality.

The University of Suriname also has a Gender Institute “Institute for Women, Gender and Development studies (IWGDs) that aims to tackle problems faced by female students at the University.

There are also a number of women's foundations, that encourage women to promote equal opportunities within society and to combat violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

The Parliament also carried out a project in collaboration with the UNDP with the aim of attracting more women in decision-making.

Currently our parliament is working on laws, such as Violence and Sexual Harassment at Work and Equal Treatment Labor Act. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has established a Gender Affairs Bureau (BGA) to promote gender equality and to comply with all international obligations. All this is laid down in a Gender Vision Policy Document 2021-2035 of mentioned ministry.

A National Youth Institute has been set up with the aim of expressing and fully experience the right of participation of young people at administrative level, making youth policy focused and effective. This institute identifies youth issues and provides the Government with this information.

Youth policy is monitored by the Institute and point of views are made known regarding to youth matters. In addition, youth ambassadors are nominated and an annual National Youth Congress is organised in which the results are processed in a memorandum for the government.

For underrepresented groups such as the Indigenous people and the Maroon community a draft law on the Collective Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Suriname, is tabled in our National Assembly as basis for further discussions.

Like many other countries, Suriname, as a member of the United Nations, has committed itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is well on its way to achieving the goals set by 2030, taking into account the impacts of Climate Change and the current crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In closing I would like to stress the challenges of Parliaments of developing countries coping with financial and economic scarcities. In this regard, fighting corruption, but also access to concessional financing are of critical importance to strengthening the goals of IPU.

I Thank you for your attention.