

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good afternoon,

Your Majesty.

President of the Congress of Deputies, Ms Meritxel Batet,

Minister of Justice, Ms Pilar Llop,

President of the Community of Madrid, Ms Isabel Díaz Ayuso,

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Duarte Pacheco.

Welcome, dignitaries and delegates.

It is an honour and a pleasure for Spain's Cortes Generales to welcome parliamentarians attending the 143rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the presence of His Majesty the King.

I would like to say how thrilled we are to welcome our colleagues from other parliaments.

We believe that there will be much to learn from the excellent conversations and debates that will take place here. Listening to one another will help us to improve what we do as the representatives of the will of our people, and will allow us to work together in a better way towards common goals.

Those of us who are part of the IPU are here because we believe in cooperation, multilateralism, democracy and human rights. As our slogan states, "For democracy. For everyone."

I do not wish to talk for too long, but I would like to share a few reflections with you.

The first concerns the value of parliamentarianism in the context of the dramatic changes and serious crises that we are experiencing across the world.

Parliaments are instruments that serve democracies and our purpose is to solve the problems affecting citizens.

To state this more plainly: we are the showcases of our democracies.

And being the face of our constitutional structures, and in the public eye, comes with advantages as well as more sensitive issues.

It is for this reason that it is so important that we lead by example; that goodwill and respect govern our debates; and that legitimate ideological interests go together with a willingness to engage in dialogue and reach agreement. That is where the strength of our institutions lies.

In other words, the public believes that democracy is real, possible and viable, if its institutions work; if parliaments listen, work and legislate for people's wellbeing.

Ultimately, we face a dilemma: confidence versus disaffection.

If we have confidence in our compatriots in parliaments, we can maintain and strengthen their confidence in the democratic system, when faced with reactionary systems which reject it.

In this regard, I am sure that most of the world's parliamentarians give their best on a daily basis, as they have done during the terrible crisis provoked by the pandemic.

That has been the case in Spain.

It is clear that, after 40 years of democracy, we are a fully consolidated democracy, which has shown during this critical period that it has agile, strong and reliable institutions.

The second reflection concerns the social and territorial cohesion of our countries.

I raise this matter here, not only because I represent my country's territorial Chamber, but because I am convinced that the most burning issues now facing us — such as climate change and the challenge of the digital revolution — have a territorial element to them.

No matter what these territorial challenges are, all of them — absolutely all of them — are based on inequality.

I would go so far as to say that the challenges relating to territorial imbalances are an acid test for our democracies. From our parliaments, we must tackle them decisively and boldly. Nothing else is acceptable. We cannot allow rural populations to feel that they are not included in the thoughts of those who make decisions about their rights.

Our challenge is to change that urban-centrist perspective. The distance between a city and a small village, dear friends, is not merely measured in kilometres. It is measured in policies and resources. It is also measured in solidarity and in cooperation. And it is measured in recognition and visibility.

That is why we must be ambitious when it comes to reducing the distance between the centre and the periphery; between the urban world and the rural world. Because the increase in inequality following the pandemic is no longer a risk. It is reality.

As a consequence, we need a new perspective that will allow us to build an equal world together; one which is harmonious and sustainable, in which we ensure equality of opportunity for the whole of society, regardless of where those people have chosen to live.

The third and final reflection is intended as a wake-up call regarding the situation faced by women in general, and women who are parliamentarians in particular.

A couple of days ago, the media picked up the story of the scandalous data in the report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the African Parliamentary Union on the violence experienced by our female colleagues in African parliaments.

However, I am not referring to Africa alone. Our global report on the same issue, covering the whole world, established the following in 2016:

- That our female colleagues experience harassment in parliaments because they are women.
- That that violence is physical, sexual and psychological.
- That in the majority of cases, the perpetrators are male parliamentarians.
- That their aim is for women to stop working in the political sphere.
- And that all of this demonstrates that our parliaments are not safe spaces for women.

As a feminist man, as a feminist politician, and as a colleague to the women who experience this violence, I cannot but feel indignation at this terrible situation.

A great British feminist activist, Kelley Temple, wrote, “Men who want to be feminists need not be given a space in feminism. They need to take the space they have in society and make it feminist.”

So, while sharing this statement, allow me to add something for the parliamentary world:

“Parliaments that aim to be genuine, worthy representatives of their citizens must guarantee that the spaces in their chambers are safe and free of violence, governed by respect, and in which parliamentary business is conducted on terms that are truly equal between men and women.”

In this regard, dear colleagues, I would like to highlight the IPU’s commitment to this matter. I would also like to acknowledge the work of female colleagues in the Forum of Women Parliamentarians. They are at the forefront of the IPU’s fight against inequality and violence against women.

But I am optimistic: as parliaments, we can eradicate sexism and violence against women. It is a matter of commitment and will.

I am coming to the end.

We must always remember that our democratic institutions are the successors to the Enlightenment.

As the custodians of that enlightened perspective, we must preserve our democratic principles.

They will allow us to succeed in the IPU's future strategy for 2022-2026. Our actions on climate change; the strengthening of democracy, human rights and gender equality; peace and security; and sustainable development, will succeed if we drive them together.

Because together we are stronger.

Thank you very much.