

Speech at the Inter-Parliamentary Union - 12 March 2023

Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

First, I would like to thank the Inter-Parliamentary Union Secretary General, H.E. Mr Martin Chungong, for his invitation to attend and address the parliamentarians of the world. The focus of the 146th General Debate could not be more relevant today; conflicts and social unrest are on the rise, and with it, discrimination, and racism.

For many minorities – including migrants – the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing culture of distrust, xenophobia, and intolerance. The pandemic has also exacerbated structural inequalities for migrants, hindering their protection and inclusion in the societies where they live – all of which further aggravate the isolation of migrants and lead to further exclusion from the rest of society.

As we recover from the worst effects of the pandemic, we need to take into account the multi-dimensional nature of the challenges in front of us today – including the direct and indirect effects of conflicts worldwide, growing food insecurity, and the devastating impacts of climate change.

Given the interconnectedness of these challenges, it is important to tackle them in a holistic manner, drawing on and supporting society's capacity for innovation, adaptation, and cooperation in order to eventually create a more sustainable and peaceful environment. Parliamentarians, as elected representatives, have a responsibility to create avenues to de-escalate conflict, activate individual and community capacities, and build pathways that steer us away from intolerance, and towards peaceful coexistence.

None of us can do this alone, which is why leadership is so essential to enable effective and sustainable solutions. We need to work with all stakeholders and at all levels – be it regional, national, local, and community level – to foster understanding, empathy, and cooperation as well as collaborate on effective prevention measures before conflict emerges, and solutions to reconstitute the social fabric should conflict divide.

As the leading UN migration agency, IOM has supported community engagement, social cohesion and reintegration programs in conflict affected countries for decades – building peaceful, tolerant, and

inclusive societies as a pre-requisite for broad based development, and as a bridge out of humanitarian dependency.

Through our disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, we offer our support to reintegrate former combatants with the goal of effectively transitioning them to civilian life as well as help the communities to which they return to ensure that they can recover, rebuild, and absorb these individuals. The role of parliamentarians in supporting these processes is critical in both creating the opportunity for communities and individuals to flourish, as well as setting the societal framework that embraces peaceful coexistence, inclusion, and tolerance.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, at IOM, we recognize that the integration or social inclusion of migrants should not simply be understood in terms of migrants' access to services. Holistic migrant integration also involves building relationships – where “social mixing” and positive contact between migrants and local communities is central.

It is about ensuring that wherever migrants are – be it in the workplace, school, shops or just walking around their neighborhood – there are opportunities to connect and engage with other people. These social interactions do not only nurture trust and mutually supportive relations in the community but also contribute to efforts in reducing inequalities within society.

Parliamentarians can play a crucial role in supporting the everyday inclusion processes of migrants by fostering a balanced and rights-based narrative about migration and setting standards for inclusive governance.

Creating an environment of peaceful coexistence and inclusion is a difficult journey and a whole of society endeavor. The country where we are today is indeed an example of a vibrant multi-cultural and multi-religious hub. A large portion of the population here in Bahrain has come from dozens of countries across Asia, Africa and beyond.

Indeed, Bahrain has a rich history of diversity and peaceful coexistence, dating all the way back to the Dilmun civilization in the 2nd millennium BC. This can also be seen with the presence of the Hindu temple in the heart of Manama, dating back the early 19th century, as well as the many churches scattered throughout the country, including the Our Lady of Arabia Catholic Church, which was inaugurated in 2021.

Excellencies, setting conditions for a fair and equitable application of the law, supporting inclusive social protection systems, recognizing the importance of youth engagement, attaining gender equality, and encouraging the constructive participation of all members of society, the media, and community leaders – are all critical aspects for establishing a ‘social contract’ which values inclusion, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance.