

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,
It is very good that the IPU puts fighting intolerance on the agenda.

IPU have a motto: democracy for everyone. But in order to reach that goal, we have to get rid of the intolerance and discrimination.

A democracy is built on tolerance, every voice should have the possibility to be heard. And to be respected.

We in Norway are worried.

In reality democracy is under pressure in an increasing number of countries. Today only a minority of the world's population lives in democracies. And the number of authoritarian regimes is on the rise.

The freedom of expression is gagged. The free press is disappearing and censorship imposed. NGOs are brought to silence, women discriminated, LGBTBIQ+ people harassed and human rights activists put in jail.

In Norway gender equality has come a long way. Norway's main strategy in achieving gender equality has been to strengthen women's economic independence through increasing their labour market participation. In 2021, about 66 per cent of all women (15-74 years) participated in the labour market, while the equivalent number of men was 71 per cent.

What really makes me mad is the situation for women in Afghanistan. To deprive 50 per cent of the population the right to secondary and higher education is a crime, a violation of human rights and destructive to the future of Afghanistan.

In Norway today, the high percentage of working women contribute more to the Norwegian economy than our revenues from the oil and gas sector.

That is the value of women, Taliban!

Wasting 50% of your nations potential will keep your country stuck in the stone-age for the foreseeable future.

I would like to end the speech drawing your attention to a male victim of intolerance:

Not so far away from this Conference Centre the Danish-Bahraini citizen Mr. Al-Khawaja has been imprisoned since 2011. He is sentenced to life imprisonment. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has concluded that his arrest was arbitrary, as it resulted from his right to fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful Assembly. His imprisonment is in contradiction with the values of the IPU and the theme for this debate. Like our colleagues from the Danish Parliament we call for his release.

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Let me finally draw your attention to the imprisoned human rights defender Mr. Al-Khawaja imprisoned here in Bahrain since 2011. His arrest was arbitrary according to the UN working group on Arbitrary Detention. I call the Bahraini authorities for his release.

