



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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146th IPU Assembly Manama (11–15 March 2023)

Speech by Mr. Duarte Pacheco President of the IPU

Manama, 11 March 2023

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, representing His Majesty the King of Bahrain,
Mr. Chairperson of the Shura Council of Bahrain,
Mr. Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain
Mr. Secretary General,
Honourable Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour to address you all at this inaugural ceremony of the 146th IPU Assembly here in the beautiful Kingdom of Bahrain. On behalf of all Members of the IPU, I wish to thank the National Assembly of Bahrain for its gracious and capable hosting of this Assembly in the wonderful surroundings of the recently opened Exhibition World Bahrain. Mr. Speaker and Mr. Chairperson, a special thanks to both of you for your personal commitment to the preparation of this Assembly. All the details were taken care of and we now have all the conditions to have a very productive and successful Assembly.

Allow me to extend my gratitude to the former Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain, Hon. Madam Fawzia Zainal – because without her personal invitation and commitment to achieve all the necessary conditions to host an IPU Assembly, we would not be here – and equally to our colleague and friend Jamal Fakhroo, who, as President of the Organizing Committee of this Assembly, spent many sleepless nights to guarantee that everything is in the right place.

Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister, we are grateful for your presence, which is very important for us in the IPU and is testimony to the importance your country places on multilateralism and parliamentary diplomacy.

Dear colleagues,

The theme of this Assembly is the promotion of peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies, and the combating of discrimination, and allow me to say that this is the correct place to discuss this issue, as I had the possibility to confirm during the Bahrain Dialogue Forum, where two great religious leaders: His Holiness Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar His Eminence Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayeb met with the support of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. But unfortunately, there are numerous indicators that peaceful coexistence and inclusion worldwide are in decline, and that intolerance and discrimination are on the rise. According to the Global Peace Index, the rise of violent demonstrations throughout 2022 pointed to increasing polarization, criticism of administrative structures and a decrease in tolerance towards diverging views. Online hate speech continues to sow division and is increasing against minorities, according to a 2021 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In addition, trust in government and the media worldwide is decreasing, religious freedoms are being curtailed, and religious discrimination, racism and xenophobia are rising.

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As parliamentarians, we have an important role and responsibility. When it comes to building peaceful and inclusive societies, we must begin that work in our own parliamentary communities. As shown by the huge caseload of the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, MPs are facing severe violations of their rights and safety, perpetrated by their governments, by their colleagues and by their constituents. It is time for the global parliamentary community to step up its solidarity, for all MPs around the world. More broadly, governments around the world must match their pledges to create tolerant and inclusive societies with concrete action to guarantee human rights for all. In this context, I wish to recall the extremely difficult situation women are facing in many countries around the world, in particular in Afghanistan. The courage and strength these women show, standing up against the violations of their rights, be it in Afghanistan or Tigray, is incredible and deserves our full support. But more than that, they deserve concrete action by the international community, with a process of dialogue to find solutions to this violation of human rights.

Many of the problems we face today are painfully familiar. The war in Ukraine continues to rage, with signs of even further escalation and ever more severe global consequences. The IPU Task Force on the peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine has continued its engagement, seeking to promote open and productive discussions. It hopes to find a route to bring parliamentarians from both sides around the same table. The IPU's calls for a cease-fire have gone unheeded. Our goal remains crystal clear – this war must end, this invasion must end, and international law must prevail. We should respect the full integrity of Ukraine, combat the terrorism that affects many areas of our planet, but specially the countries of the Sahel region, where in 2022 more people died than in all other countries of the world.

It is important that everyone helps these countries to fight their war on terrorism, otherwise the problem will increase and more people will die or abandon this critical zone.

The combat on poverty needs to be addressed. The last report from the UN indicates that the number of least developed countries increased in recent years. How can we accept this? More help from richer countries to poorer countries is urgent. Also, improved governance in these countries is in many cases essential in order to really be able to fight poverty.

Also, very near to where we are now, we have the conflict in Palestine, which is very far from ending. The IPU defends the two-State Solution: Israel and Palestine. Both states have the right to live in a sustainable and safe environment.

Israel needs to feel safe, without terrorist attacks that kill innocent people. But Palestine needs also to be safe and have no fear of attacks, and especially, the Palestinians need to have a sustainable state, which is why we need to condemn the settlement policy of Israel.

Moreover, we must not forget the many other conflicts around the world. But MPs do not enter these challenging times empty-handed: powerful concepts and tools are at their disposal. The application of both the human security and common security approaches which foresee action centred on human development and the protection of people, as well as the use of dialogue to build trust and confidence between people and nations, should help us in this endeavour.

In Nusa Dua one year ago, we recognized the urgency of the climate crisis as an existential threat to humankind and acknowledged that immediate action must be taken.

Tragic floods in Pakistan or in Brazil, hurricanes in Philippines, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Mozambique have killed thousands of people. The rise of the sea level in the Pacific is destroying life in many countries. Awful and severe drought and heat waves have killed thousands in Africa and Europe...

We must act!

We will be launching here the IPU's new *Parliaments for the Planet* campaign, with the aim of mobilizing all parliaments, MPs and staff to undertake concrete actions to reduce their carbon footprint. And the IPU itself will also be taking action. Some of these actions are institutional but others relate to individual behaviour and consumption. We all can – and should – do more to combat climate change. The ten actions that accompany the launch of the IPU climate change campaign outline concrete steps that each one of us can take. I encourage you all to use this document and make a commitment to yourself and your children and grandchildren that this planet will be a better place in which to live.

But we also need to be prepared for other dangers. The worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is over, but another health crisis might be around the corner. Technological advances, particularly in terms of vaccines, are reasons for optimism. The recent devastating earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye show that we need to renew our focus on disaster risk reduction, in every part of the world. In the Horn of Africa, 22 million people are currently experiencing acute food insecurity due to a historic drought that began in late 2020 and is expected to continue. Already, more than 1.7 million people have left their homes in search of food and water. The clock is also ticking on the Sustainable Development Goals – we must not backslide on our commitment to make the world a better place for all by 2030. Great strides have been made over the past 20 years, and we must build on those achievements.

And it seems that democracy, too, is under threat. Limiting the rights of young men and women to express their views and protest peacefully poses a major challenge to democracy. Limiting women's access to – or even excluding them – from decision-making positions, education or health care is also a threat to democracy and to basic human rights. What is happening in Afghanistan needs a strong condemnation, when the right of education is refused to women and MPs are being executed.

The proliferation of disinformation and fake news is shaping up to be another big issue on our agenda. We need to ensure that our parliaments become ever stronger institutions. More effective, more inclusive, more resilient and more accountable. IPU Assemblies are a golden opportunity for us to learn from one another, to combine our strengths and address the world's problems together.

The IPU has worked in an intensive way for many years to encourage greater gender equality in parliaments, and the Kigali Declaration on gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments, adopted at our last Assembly, was just the latest example of this commitment. But sadly, parliamentary elections last year were a mixed bag in terms of improving the gender balance of our parliaments. On the upside, for the first time ever, not a single functioning parliament in the world has zero women, and eight countries with parliamentary renewals in 2022 saw women elected or appointed to more than 40% of seats. But the representation of women grew at its slowest rate for six years and true global parity remains decades away. We must redouble our efforts to reach the goals we have set for our parliaments and our countries.

In addition to more women MPs, we need more young MPs. We cannot be truly inclusive without including the younger generation. The IPU's *I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!* campaign continues to go from strength to strength, but more can be done. I encourage you to sign up and implement the transformative actions promoted by the campaign to rejuvenate your own parliament.

We have a busy year ahead of us. Let us set the scene for a productive 2023 by getting down to work on the many issues we face right away here in Manama. I wish you all the best for a fruitful Assembly. Thank you for your attention.