

Speech of the APA Secretary General
Under the Theme: “Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting
Intolerance”
At 146th IPU Assembly
11-15 March 2023
Manama- the Kingdom of Bahrain

**/Madam President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,**

It is a great pleasure for me to have given the privilege to make a brief intervention on the theme of general debate before this assembly in my capacity as Secretary General of Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA); a regional parliamentary body with widespread spectrum of member parliaments in the vast Continent of Asia.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the government, parliament and the people of the Kingdom of Bahrain for their generous hospitality and excellent organization of this IPU Assembly.

Dear Colleagues,

To promote the values of diversity and tolerance is the responsibility that, to a great extent, rests on the shoulder of parliaments and their members in the fight against racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance. Building the foundations for a more tolerant inclusive and respectful world peace, security and the rule of law are the enduring objectives that parliaments as elected officials are tasked to pursue as core values of every society. To this end, parliaments and their members are duty-bound to use all means available to them to promote peaceful co-existence and constructive cooperation between different communities and to prevent any undesirable discriminatory treatment arising from their belonging to an ethnic, cultural or religious group, in a spirit of tolerance and dialogue.

In fact, pluralism, openness, cooperation and reaching agreement in diversity are the very essence of parliaments. Consequently, parliaments are required to take effective measures to combat incitement to, or acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by hatred

and intolerance based on culture, religion or belief, which may cause discord and disharmony within and among religious and cultural communities in compliance with relevant international obligations.

Based on this premise, building peace and preventing violent extremism cannot be won with hard power only. We need soft power also, we need to win the battle of ideas, through education, through democratic debate, through a better understanding of each other's cultures and religions. Religious, cultural and ethnic diversity should not make a cause for intolerance, rather they should be considered as a base for dialogue and respect within and among civilizations as valuable means of peaceful co-existence and cooperation.

This is a vitally important dictum that has been recognized and pursued by the APA in the context of multicultural dynamism in Asia for making a strong Asian community based on mutual respect and recognition of all Asian cultures and civilizations, with due respect to fundamental values of humanity.

Dear Colleagues,

Parliaments play a critical role to address the challenges of our times, when not everything can be solved at the level of Governments alone. Parliamentarians have the unique power to bring solutions closer to the people, and make sure their needs and concerns are at the heart of our response.

In light of the foregoing, APA has tried to give this issue its due weight and made recommendations under the numerous resolutions adopted by the APA by delegates representing member parliaments at various meetings of the APA Standing Committee on Cultural and Social Affairs.

On cultural diversity, APA has encouraged further promotion of intercultural dialogues and interreligious exchanges throughout Asia. Accordingly, it rejects all manifestations of discrimination that are based on racism, xenophobia and all other related forms of intolerance.

As a result, it appreciates and promotes the benefits of diversity and good governance among Asian nations. At the same time, it encourages values such as justice, human rights, nondiscrimination, democracy and respect within and among communities and nations. To this end, APA member parliaments remain committed to the protection of the rights of all communities, where applicable, so as to ensure the fulfillment of community rights.

In light of its efforts, APA calls on all its member parliaments to promote tolerance and empathy among Asian nations with a view to diminish distrust, misunderstanding and conflict among religious communities.

Thank you for your attention