

Dear President, fellow parliamentarians

It is an honour for me to stand here and it is a unique opportunity to engage with colleagues from all over the world.

I was elected to the Danish Parliament for the first time four months ago. Before the election, I was a school teacher teaching 13-15 year old kids. These kids were full of optimism and confidence in the future.

We spoke a lot about dialogue, the importance of mutual understanding and the right to disagree.

Talking to each other and expressing our points of views are basic conditions in every democracy. If we are not able to speak with each other, it really looks difficult. We, parliamentarians have an obligation to show our young citizens that they can express their own opinions without risking imprisonment or other kind of punishments.

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. The Danish IPU-delegation call for his release.

Unfortunately Mr. Al-Khawaja is not the only human rights defender who is imprisoned for exercising their fundamental freedoms. Such incidents undermines hope and optimism among the young generation.

Dialogue is sometimes difficult – but it is vital for our democracies.

Here at the IPU I speak as a young parliamentarian. However, back home my students sometimes found that I was old fashioned on certain issues, for instance when it comes to communication on social media.

I think a lot about their future and I want to show them that their old teacher in fact has understood the message from the young generation: If we are going to live together in peaceful co-existence – and we have to – then dialogue is one of the most important tools to help us moving in the right direction.

Thank you for listening!