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Iceland

First, I would like to thank Bahrain for hosting the IPU and doing it so well.

And thanks to the IPU and the delegates for providing a forum for MP's from all over the World to debate the big issues that concern us all.

But are we debating the issues as much as we should?

As parliamentarians we deal with many things, big and small. Few are as big as the ones we are discussing at this assembly.

Peace is probably the biggest issue of all. And hopefully we all believe in the importance of fighting intolerance.

But how do we want to achieve success in these fields and others?

Do we really believe that free and open debate is the answer and if so, are we acting accordingly?

Sometimes it seems that the bigger the issue the more restrained allowed speech is.

We can consider huge issues like the environment and the refugee crises. If we really believe in the power of free debate, we need to be able to discuss these issues without fear. Is that not the best way to find the best solutions?

Or do we secretly believe that we have the answers and need to prevent others from distorting the one true message.

A person can be worried about the environment but have reservations about wind power as a solution.

Someone can be very genuinely concerned about the refugee crisis but feel that the best way to tackle it is by maintaining control to prioritise for those that are in most danger.

We worry about fake news, but I have noticed that sometimes news that was considered fake turned out to be true and news that was thought to be true turned out to be fake.

So, what is the solution? Might the solution be a belief in the importance of freedom of speech and in democracy. -The idea that people are really to be trusted to consider the information and make decisions about how our countries should be run?

Do we really believe in free speech? Do we believe that debate and the freedom of people to choose between different options will lead to the best results?

In other words, do we really believe in **democracy**, or would we like to decide what is right and wrong and tell the people what to say and believe?

We as parliamentarians need to mean it when we say that the freedom to say what you think is important.

That will mean that we will need to put up with hearing all sorts of opinions we don't like. It will mean that idiots will be allowed to express their often-strange opinions.

But let's remember that sometimes those who were considered idiots turned out to be right.

Or as Galileo Galilei put it, *"I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him"*.

We should not believe that we can make the World perfect!

Too quote Galileo again; *'it still turns'*, and it will continue to turn. What we can do is preserve the principles that have served us best and will continue to do so if we continue to fight for them.

Finally, I call on the Bahraini authorities to finish this great assembly of parliamentarians by releasing Danish-Bahraini citizen Mr. Al-Khawaja, imprisoned since 2011 for using his freedom of expression.