

Address by Mr. **Edmunds Teirumnieks**,  
Head of the **Latvian** National Group to the IPU,

on *Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: fighting intolerance*  
March 2023, Manama

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues!

It is my pleasure to take part in this Debate on a topic that has become increasingly relevant in current realities.

Let me remind you, that six years ago, in 2017, we debated on subject about *promoting peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue*. Has the situation in the world improved during these years? NO.

The Global Peace index finds out that the world is at its lowest point of peacefulness in the last 15 years. We see violent demonstrations, hate speech, fake news, growing social and economic inequalities, diminishing trust in democracy and human rights, but it cannot justify the use of brutal force.

Today, the word "peace" must be understood literally, because a real war now is taking place in Europe, more than one year, and peaceful coexistence is like an ever attainable dream in people's minds.

We are parliamentarians and we are responsible for the implementation of current IPU strategy, which means to focus on climate change, democracy, human rights, respect for women, sustainable development and more other nice things, but how does it go together with a brutal wars in Europe and other parts of the world? And who is to blame for such a situation? And what we can do to improve the situation?

Some insights on how Latvian society has managed to maintain cultural pluralism and peaceful coexistence of various ethnicities and religious groups.

Historically Latvia has been situated at the geographical and cultural crossroads; many ethnic groups have been living together for hundreds of

years. Our society has learned tolerance towards different cultures, lifestyles and beliefs, at the same time preserving and shaping its own unique identity.

Last year out of almost 2 million of the total population of Latvia, only 60% were Latvians. There are more than hundred ethnicities living in Latvia. The largest groups are Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and others. And we have more than 300 minority associations and foundations.

Schools in Latvia illustrate our inclusiveness: there are almost 700 general education schools in Latvia. Out of them 77% are schools that teach only in Latvian. 20% teach in Russian and Latvian, but 11 schools (almost 2%) implement programs in other minority languages, such as Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian and others. These schools are fully funded by the State.

In Latvia we promote inter-cultural dialogue by strong foreign language learning traditions. Every person in Latvia knows at least one foreign language, in most cases - two or three, and this is one of the best ways to promote people-to-people contacts and improve understanding and tolerance to other cultures, ethnicities, religions.

A great role in studies play not only schools, but cultural centres, too. Centres like German, Russian, Jewish, French, Danish, Chinese and others have a long tradition in Latvia.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

By our Constitution in Latvia the state is separated from the church.

Historically, there are strong Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox traditions in Latvia. Despite differences, these groups have managed to develop ecumenical dialogue. At the same time Latvians have remained tolerant towards other religions, including the Judaism, Islam and Buddhism.

''Equal rights to all people living in Latvia, regardless of their ethnicity or religion'', thus our Constitution strongly confirms that intolerance is not allowed and not acceptable in Latvia.

Our Parliament has always supported the position of equal attitude, without reference to race, ethnic origin, language or religion. Standing Committees of Education, Culture and Human Rights – address issues related to intercultural, ethnic dialogue and social integration. They keep close contact with NGOs.

Dear Colleagues!

Latvia is a small country on the world map, but our experience from the previous century, going through the time of war, occupation and deportations, is significant.

There has been no war in Latvia for almost eighty years. But there is a war near our borders now!

And I want to remind you that we all are representatives of the people. Our nations have given us a mandate to shape our present and future. And I really don't believe that any sane person could vote for intolerance, resulting in war, killed children and raped women.

We all know theory, that nobody has rights forcefully convince others about the superiority of his culture, faith, religion, world order or other things, but in reality we live in the era of conflicts, clashes, wars, exactly based on ethnic, religious and other intolerances.

Therefore - today, more than ever, we, dear colleagues, need to promote respect for the universal values - human dignity, equality, right to sovereignty, integrity and peace.

For tolerance - not only in words, but in stable solutions and real actions! Just to be complementary in the diversity! Thank you!