

Speech by Hon. Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the House of Representatives

General Debate, High Level Segment

'Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance'

IPU 146th Assembly, Manama Bahrain

11-15 March 2023

Excellency Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU,

Honourable colleagues,

Distinguished parliamentarians,

Keeping peace and promoting peaceful coexistence is a continuous process – one, which is not limited to a particular geographical region or point in history but is rather a universal journey requiring joint and innovative tools. It is crucial to transform words into action and be open to different beliefs and creeds. Therefore, I emphasize the importance to recognize that tolerance and peace are not abstract unattainable concepts applicable only to certain countries or political realities, but are universal notions that should form the basis of our every policy and legal script. Moreover, I emphasize that tolerance and peace necessitate a reciprocal approach and the whole-hearted participation by everyone. From the youngest members of our societies to our elderly population, from the remote farmer working the land to the urban business CEO. We all hold the potential to be ambassadors for tolerance and peace.

Esteemed colleagues,

As elected representatives of our respective communities, Parliaments enact legislation and are in direct contact with their respective constituency. Therefore, Members of Parliament are instrumental to promote and foster

fundamental values of non-violence, respect and openness to others, tolerance, solidarity and peace. Through our parliamentary work we need to reaffirm the importance of mutual understanding and dialogue as the basis for any functional society and inter-personal relationship. By mutual understanding, I do not mean the homogenization of society. It does not mean that both sides of the political spectrum agree on everything they discuss under the sun. On the contrary, through dialogue we create a vibrant hub to exchange different traditions and beliefs. Subsequently, they reinforce each other to create long lasting peaceful co-existence.

I come from a small island state in the centre of the Mediterranean in which politicians keep constant contact with their constituents. Even though it is not legally binding, Malta has one of the highest turnouts in elections as citizens follow closely national politics. It is therefore more important for politicians and members my Parliament to feel this responsibility, to act and speak in a respectful way.

Malta is right at the centre of the Mediterranean, a sea which is surrounded by different continents, different cultures and diverse economic, geographical and social realities. Unfortunately, it is region which has been afflicted, for way too long, by conflicts. Malta, since its Independence and later as a neutral state has always advocated peace in the region. Already in 1975 at the meeting in Helsinki, by the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Malta advocated for an inclusive political dialogue thus promoting the participation of Southern Mediterranean states. In the years that followed, Malta continued to be a beacon of neutrality and facilitated the organisation of numerous meetings and events aimed at promoting dialogue and peace.

As members of Parliament, we also have an important role to use parliamentary diplomacy as a catalyst for the propagation of tolerance and peace. Interparliamentary fora should serve to strengthen dialogue and provide us with the possibility to discuss and act in a timely way where elements of intolerance and hate seep into our discourse and communities. Malta hosts the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace. This Council began as a window for tolerance and spreading peace and noble human objectives. It developed into an

international organization that relies on democratic principles in order to reach true and sustained peace for the humankind through spreading the culture of tolerance between countries. The Maltese Parliament is engaged in the activities carried out by this Global Council and in June this year a Conference will be held in the Maltese Parliament on Building Tolerance and Peace in the MENA region.

Finally, on the international level, IPU can serve as a very good platform to promote peace. A year ago, we met in Nusa Dua and adopted a resolution entitled Peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine, respecting international law, the Charter of the United Nations and territorial integrity. That resolution recommended that a taskforce on the situation in Ukraine is established to facilitate the role of parliaments in formulating feasible peaceful solutions. It is crucial that we continue to seek tangible results through the work of this task force.

Colleagues,

I would like to conclude by sharing with you a very short but meaningful sentence by a wonderful person who practiced peace by sharing love with others through her life experience, the late Mother Therese of Calcutta;

'if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other'

Thank you.