

Speech of Abdulla Riyaz, MP, head of Maldivian delegation to IPU's 146th Assembly

President of Inter-Parliamentary Union, Duarte Pacheco,

Secretary General, Martin Chungong,

Esteemed colleagues,

Assalaam alakum varahmathullah vabarathuh, and a good morning.

It is an honour for me to speak to you today about the significance of combating intolerance, not just in our own communities but on an international level. Intolerance is a venom that threatens to sever human bonds and undermines our efforts to create a more peaceful and just world. It is a collective responsibility to stand up against it, and as the guardians of the rule of law, human rights, and justice of our respective countries, we have a duty to encourage our societies to embrace inclusivity.

We have gathered here from all over the world, bringing with us diverse viewpoints, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. It is important to acknowledge our diversity since it is what makes each of us unique. It also suggests that we run the risk of misinterpreting one another, passing judgment on the other based on our differences, and failing to recognize the rich tapestry of the human experience. In short, diversity is what sets us apart, so honouring that is important.

Distinguished parliamentarians!

Intolerance can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as prejudice against particular racial or ethnic groups or bigotry motivated by one's political, religious, or gender views. It can be subtle, such as through the use of derogatory language or stereotypes, or as apparent as violence or hate crimes. We are seeing both these forms, especially on online platforms. Online hate speech continues to sow division. According to a 2021 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights, online hate speech is increasing against minorities. As representatives of the people, we have a responsibility to safeguard them by passing the required legislation and holding our governments accountable at the slightest suspicion of its failure.

Esteemed colleagues!

As representatives of the people, we face two enormous challenges in order to accomplish what is expected of us by our societies. We ought to acknowledge that the public's trust and confidence in the legislature and political offices is waning. I will admit it! I acknowledge, based on personal knowledge, that many Maldivians are losing faith in the political system, including the legislature. Due to many factors! I discussed the gravity of the situation with my colleagues and my political party. We believe that the distrust of the public stems from our inability to address their concerns. Conversely, at times, we tend to exceed their perception of civil liberties when we confront those matters.

Distinguished members!

The Maldives is among the luckiest nations, as there are very few factors that could cause societal division. Because we are a nation of one language, race, and religion. Yet, religious intolerance has crept in, and there are a few individuals determined to split our society and destroy social cohesion. I do not wish to identify these fanatics with our faith, as their goal to create violence has nothing to do with religion. The Maldives has been coping with violent extremism since 2007, and the threat persists. As the creator of law, the Maldives Parliament has adopted a series of laws to bolster the legal armoury against violent extremism and terrorism. Aside from that, laws are regularly amended in an effort to promote social cohesiveness and religious unity. The national efforts to counter the threat are constantly being challenged by what is happening globally. The Maldivian youth, like the youth of many other countries, are drawn to internal conflicts occurring elsewhere. They migrate to those places

with the assumption that these conflicts are religious in nature. It is too late by the time they realize their error of judgment. Thus, education is the most crucial weapon for preventing young people from joining these conflicts and for helping them recognize their mistake and facilitate reintegration into society.

Dear colleagues!

For these reasons, we must all work together to fight all versions of extremism and intolerance, and we must do so with urgency. The repercussions of intolerance are too severe to disregard. It pulls apart families, communities, and even entire nations. It engenders a culture of dread and mistrust, as well as violence and conflict.

To fight intolerance, we must first recognize it, denounce it, and stand up against it. This requires us to speak up when we observe acts of intolerance, whether they are directed at us or others, whether by the arms of the state or individuals. It also involves educating ourselves and others about various cultures, faiths, and traditions and, most importantly, public expectations. Yes, we are following the right direction by acknowledging intolerance and embracing the theme “Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance”. For this, I offer my profound gratitude to you all and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. By adopting this theme in the General Debate, we are demonstrating our commitment to fight intolerance through dialogue and engagement between diverse groups.

Esteemed members!

An important element in this fight that we must accept is, ensuring that rules and procedures are inclusive and do not discriminate against any group in particular. This encompasses education, employment, housing, and healthcare policy.

In conclusion, I would say that fighting intolerance must be a continual endeavour, and we must all be devoted to. We must work together to establish a world where intolerance does not exist, and where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

By standing up against intolerance, we can build a brighter future for ourselves and for future generations. Thank you.