

146th IPU Assembly
Manama, Bahrain (11-15 March 2023)

Honourable Chair,

Distinguished colleagues,

The concept note for this general debate opens in an alarming tone: *“The world is becoming a more divided and less tolerant and peaceful place.”* Alarming, but also realistic, as many of us can underline from their personal experience. And sometimes it seems that the quote attributed to Cicero: *“When weapons speak, the laws fall silent”*¹ is painfully true. We live through challenging times and I am glad that the IPU urges to work towards peaceful coexistence, inclusive societies and fighting intolerance.

Someone who pointed this out long before the IPU was even founded was my 17th century fellow countryman Hugo de Groot. A theologian and a brilliant lawyer, Hugo de Groot laid some of the corner stones of today’s international public law, but also a fundament for human rights as we know them these days.

The Holy Bible teaches us: *“Give justice to the weak (..), maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute”*². In that line, Hugo de Groot emphasized the importance of making laws that enhance freedom of belief and religion, freedom of speech and access to justice. Laws that contribute to peaceful resolution of conflicts instead of warfare.

As law making is one of the key functions of parliaments, I respectfully paraphrase Hugo de Groot’s call upon everyone of us holding this responsible position. Let us be guardians of the rule of law, deliverers of justice and peace, strivers for human rights. So that even in times of crisis and when weapons speak, the laws may never be silent.

Hendrik-Jan Talsma

¹ *“Inter arma silent leges”*, Cicero in: Pro Milone

² Psalm 82:3 (English Standard Version 2016)