

**146th IPU Assembly
Manama, Bahrain**

General Debate

Promoting Peaceful Coexistence and Inclusive Societies: Fighting Intolerance

*Delivered by Park Yong-jin,
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Honorable delegates, good morning.

I'm Park Yong-jin, head of the Republic of Korea Delegation.

The culture of hatred and discrimination is on the rise, paradoxically even in pluralistic societies supposed to respect personal freedom and individuality and accept diverse ways of life. The Republic of Korea is not different. We live in a society where people are graded and judged based on their individual characteristics such as gender, age, regional affiliation, and sexual orientation.

Amid social polarization and communication disconnect triggered by various challenges facing humanity, including infectious diseases, wars, climate crisis, and natural disasters, hate speech and discriminatory language are spreading at an alarming rate in the anonymity of cyberspace.

We need inclusion and tolerance not just for the vulnerable and disadvantaged, but as a precondition for co-prosperity for all.

Distinguished delegates,

Unfortunately, eliminating discrimination, exclusion, slander, and hatred is not something that can be done at a stroke with laws and institutions. Still, there are things that parliaments can do to make an inclusive society without discrimination.

I would like to propose a two-pronged approach.

First, parliaments should strengthen anti-discrimination laws and institutions. Second, parliaments should serve as an inclusive platform for a diversity of views.

Parliaments have the responsibility to enact laws to prevent discrimination and address structural inequalities. And anti-discrimination laws that affirm the principle of equality go a long way in preventing discrimination and exclusion.

The principle of equality is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Korea. It says all people are equal before the law and should be free from discrimination based on gender,

religion, or social status in all areas of their lives. And to support the realization of the right to equality as one of the innate fundamental rights, two specific legislations are in place - the Framework Act on Gender Equality and the Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities.

Also, we are working on a bill titled the Comprehensive Anti-discrimination Act, which aims at minimizing legal blind spots and combating multiple discrimination by prohibiting all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, physical condition, and thought in all areas, including employment, education, and public service.

The Korean society has been talking about this bill for a long time, but unable to reach social and political consensus due to opposition based on religious and economic grounds. It is shameful that just talking about this bill has sometimes spawned discrimination and hatred. But the Republic of Korea is committed to reaching a responsible conclusion soon, albeit late compared to other countries, for the elimination of structural discrimination and creation of an inclusive society by learning from other countries' experiences and examples.

In addition to the legal and regulatory efforts against discrimination, parliaments should ensure diverse views are represented to minimize blind spots in policy decisions and lay the foundation for inclusive policies.

While ensuring that parliaments are open and accessible to people wishing to express their views, parliaments need diversity in their composition.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea has a variety of programs and policies to provide citizens with opportunities to participate in parliamentary affairs. It provides real-time streaming of standing committee meetings through TV broadcasting and online media and is preparing another platform for real-time streaming of other parliamentary activities such as policy seminars. To enhance access to parliamentary information by those with hearing impairments, it is building an AI-based system for real-time captioning. It also has a public petition system through which the diverse legislative needs of the people are communicated and discussed.

In addition, the proportional representation system provides opportunities for diverse groups in our society to participate in politics and ensures their representation in parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In our journey towards a more inclusive society, parliamentary solidarity can be instrumental. International conferences, such as this IPU Assembly, workshops, and seminars are important opportunities to raise awareness among parliamentarians about a tolerant society. By exchanging ideas and converging different views, we adopt joint declarations and resolutions and build international principles.

We should all keep in mind that qualitative growth is possible only when prosperity is truly inclusive without discrimination or exclusion.

Building an inclusive society is our responsibility as people's representatives. Thank you.