

148th IPU Assembly - General Debate

Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding

Statement by the Head of the Austrian Delegation

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Honourable President,
Honourable Speakers,
Colleagues and Friends,

The current state of international peace and security is alarming. In an era marked by increasing polarization, widespread conflict, and global crises, our commitment to parliamentary diplomacy is more critical than ever.

It is therefore a great disappointment for me that – for the second time – we were unable to discuss the situation in Gaza collectively within the framework of IPU. The terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 by Hamas-led militants and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, should have been in the centre of our discussions. Let me remind you, that we have been able to discuss other emergency items such as the war against Ukraine during the Assembly in Kigali and the “serious humanitarian crisis, affecting the people in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Yemen and other countries” in Manama.

Despite this, it is imperative we overstep our feelings of frustration and disappointment, though they are justified. Our focus must now be on learning our lessons, maintaining respectful dialogue, and identifying common ground. Our goals should include

- an immediate ceasefire to safeguard civilians,
- the unconditional release of all hostages of 7 October,
- the facilitation of humanitarian aid,
- and unwavering respect for international law.

These were the topics our geopolitical group suggested to start discussions here in the plenary.

Beside the fight of Israel against the Hamas terrorist and the war in Ukraine, we should have further emerging threats in our focus – threats including cyber and hybrid warfare, terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, climate change, geopolitical instabilities and threats to democratic values, such as disinformation and the misuse of artificial intelligence, further complicate global stability.

In the face of these challenges, parliamentary diplomacy represents a unique and vital tool in our collective efforts to foster global peace and mutual understanding. It goes beyond traditional diplomacy by bringing together the voices of the people, represented through their elected officials, to engage directly in the international arena. This people-centric approach ensures that the pursuit of peace and understanding is not just a top-down endeavor but a shared responsibility, that reflects the will and aspirations of the global community.

While the founding year of the Inter-Parliamentary Union 1889 is considered the "birth year of parliamentary diplomacy", parliament's foreign policy activities have increased

significantly, especially since the 2000s. Parliamentary diplomacy has become increasingly important in international relations, especially against the backdrop of globalization and rapid progress in the field of communication and transport technologies.

With the Inter Parliamentary Union as historical pioneer, the Austrian Parliament has shown commitment by being the first national parliament to co-host the World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in Vienna 2021 and demonstrating its proactive engagement in IPU's wide-ranging activities. Furthermore, for over two decades, Vienna has been the chosen venue for the Winter Meetings of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly. Similarly, Austrian representatives have held significant positions in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, underscoring just a few of Austria's contributions to parliamentary diplomacy on multilateral level.

Therefore, let us renew our commitment to parliamentary diplomacy as a cornerstone of our efforts to build bridges of peace and understanding. Let us work together, with respect, empathy and determination, to create a world where dialogue triumphs over division, where cooperation replaces conflict, and where the shared aspirations of our peoples guide our path toward a peaceful and inclusive global community for everyone.

Thank you.
