

EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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REMARKS BY RT. HON. JOSEPH NTAKIRUTIMANA, SPEAKER OF THE EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (EALA), AT THE 148TH IPU: 23RD - 27TH MARCH 2024, THE CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE CONFERENCES DE GENEVE (CICG) IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

- Madam President of the IPU, Rt. Hon. Dr. Tulia Ackson;
- Speakers and Heads of Delegation, here present;
- Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning/Afternoon!!

Firstly, it's my pleasure and gratitude to speak at the 148th IPU conference.

Madam President, I take this opportunity to congratulate you for steering the IPU at this important time when it is coordinating various efforts to make our world more responsible, livable, peaceful and economically viable.

Secondly, as I extend warm greetings from the East Africa Legislative Assembly, allow me to appreciate all the courtesies from the IPU and the Government of Switzerland.

With regards to the objectives of the 148th Conference, EALA is firmly committed to the cause of the IPU and the theme: "*Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding*". The theme, not only reflects issues that are affecting the globe but, also our communities in the east African region; issues which top the agenda and call for greater interest and action.

Madam President, distinguished delegations, the search for peaceful existence is a historical agenda. Indeed, peaceful co-existence spurs development, prosperity for all, enhanced security and absence of conflict and anarchy. It is for these ideals that nation states and world leaders have historically come together to resolve major conflicts. To this end among others, I recall the treaties after major revolutions in Europe and the Americas; the Berlin Conference; the league of nations; the United Nations and its institutions such as the General Assembly, the Security Council and the agencies. I also look towards strong regional economic communities such as the EU, EAC, ECOWAS, SADC among others. These aspire to promote prosperity,

security, rule of law, and the conditions necessary for communities to realize their socioeconomic potential.

Armed conflict continues to afflict many parts of our world, including the East African region particularly in the restive great lakes' region. We are talking of the DRC and surrounding countries like Somalia and the Sudan. Clearly, the conflicts are resource based: mostly because of scarcity, greed, the desire for control, economic inequality and discrimination of marginalized groups. Sadly again, one can trace the root of such conflicts to major world powers whose desire it is to plunder resources while the local citizens fight against each other to sustain them.

Therefore, as parliamentarians, we know that to every conflict, there are two sides, hence, our best shot should be to escalate dialogue as a catalyst for peaceful co-existence; AND yes, if we know the causes then we can pursue protracted initiatives to end conflicts. We are gifted with parliamentary privilege to undertake our work of legislation, oversight, representation and budgetary allocations. We also must take advantage of establishing specialized caucuses to empower special interest and marginalized groups: women, men, youth, PWDs as the case may be.

Specific to the East African Legislative Assembly, our work has been cut out because our region aspires to be a prosperous, competitive, secure, stable and politically united East Africa; and we have in place laws, manuals and policies that seek to prevent conflicts, such as the EAC Protocol on Peace and Security, EAC Regional Strategy for Peace and Security and the EAC Protocol on Defense. We also have in place mechanisms for the establishment of a standby force to intervene in partner states with conflicts.

As a way of empowering citizens, EALA has also taken the lead to adopt resolutions for action by the Council of Ministers on matters such as: -

- i) Enhanced Gender Equality in Access to Food and Nutrition;
- ii) Recognizing the women's caucus as a forum to promote the full participation of women in programmes and activities of the community;
- iii) Implementing measures to enhance gender mainstreaming;
- iv) Action to prevent trafficking in persons, protect victims of the crime of trafficking in persons and prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking in persons, in the EAC region.

EALA is ever aware that sustainable peace cannot be attained, until people feel safe, trust each other and capable of holding their governments accountable to guarantee their protection and accord them a peaceful and secure environment to live, reside, trade, and travel freely.

At the national parliamentary front, EALA coordinates with the EAC national assemblies to establish Standing Committees on EAC Affairs under which regional matters including those relating to regional peace and security are discussed.

Several activities have been undertaken that allowed our region to achieve the following milestones:

- i) Establishment of Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism;
- ii) Regional Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution framework;
- iii) Implementation of Small Arms and Light Ammunitions initiatives in line with the Nairobi Protocol on small arms;
- iv) Organization of regular Joint Command Post and Field Training Exercises every two years to enhance inter-operability of the Armed Forces of the Partner States;
- v) Exchange of trainers and trainees between and amongst the Partner States' military training institutions at various levels;
- vi) Deployment of EAC armed forces through the Nairobi Peace Process on restoration of peace and security in the Eastern DRC;
- vii) Contributing troops to fight terrorism in Somalia under the various international forums.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I conclude by reaffirming EALA's stand in promoting peaceful coexistence and solidarity to regional and world peace.

I thank you all, for your kind attention!