

PARLIAMENT OF GHANA



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**PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY: BUILDING
BRIDGES FOR PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING**

**The 148th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),
Geneva, Switzerland. 23rd to 27th March, 2024.**

Under the theme:

***Parliamentary Diplomacy: Building Bridges for peace and understanding.
A speech delivered by the RT. Hon. Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin,
Speaker of the 8th Parliament of Ghana***

My beloved President of the IPU and Chairperson of the 148th Assembly of the IPU, the Secretary General of the IPU, Colleagues Speakers, Presiding Officers and Heads of Delegations, distinguished delegates, esteemed organizers of the 148th International Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference, hon. Members of Parliament, respected members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of Ghana, I send you warm greetings from the Parliament and people of Ghana.

As we embark on this journey of dialogue and cooperation, let us seize this opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to building bridges for peace and understanding, and transcending borders and differences to create a world that is more just, equitable, and harmonious for all.

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, where conflicts often transcend national borders and complex global challenges demand cooperative solutions, the role of parliamentary diplomacy is not just important but also crucial for building bridges toward peace and understanding.

Hon. Chairperson, it is common knowledge that the 21st-century world in which we find ourselves is facing a myriad of complex challenges that seriously threaten global peace, security, and understanding, and therefore demand immediate attention. The ongoing conflicts in regions such as Syria, Yemen, the Great Lakes Area, the Balkans, the Korean Peninsula, the Sahel region, Ukraine and Russia, and the Hamas and Israel war,

continue to cause immense suffering and displacement of people across borders while severely undermining stability and security on a global scale.

The rise of violent extremism, fueled by ideologies of hate and intolerance, poses a significant threat to peace and stability, leading to terrorist attacks and sectarian violence in various parts of the world.

Increasing polarization within societies, fueled by partisan politics and ideological divisions, is eroding social cohesion and severely hampering efforts to find common ground and address shared challenges.

Widening economic disparities between rich and poor nations, as well as within countries, are exacerbating social tensions, fueling resentment, and contributing to instability and conflicts across many countries.

Finally, climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation, which have attracted global attention and have thus dominated discussions at many international conferences, pose existential threats to human security and aggravate competition over scarce resources, leading to conflicts over land, water, and natural resources.

Mr. Chairperson, as we navigate these complex challenges of the 21st century, parliamentary diplomacy stands as a beacon of hope, offering a pathway towards building bridges for peace and understanding on a global scale. In the light of these pressing challenges, the international community must take a comprehensive and collaborative approach that engages all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, in promoting inclusive dialogue, cooperation, and reconciliation, and advocating for peaceful resolution of conflicts on the global stage.

As noted by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, during the celebration of the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace in 2020, *“It is not enough to proclaim the virtues of multilateralism; we must continue to show its added value”*

It is now clear that no country can singlehandedly address global issues such as climate change, terrorism, violent extremism, natural disasters, and pandemic diseases¹. In this context, parliamentary diplomacy plays an increasingly important role in strengthening global governance and promoting multi-stakeholder consultation and partnership. There is ample evidence that demonstrates that parliamentary assemblies and parliamentarians are ‘autonomous actors, prime movers, path breakers, agenda setters, and actors on their initiative’ in international affairs².

It is high time that governments, civil society and international organizations work together to promote peace, understanding, and cooperation among nations.

Unpacking the Theme of the Conference

The theme of this esteemed conference, "**Parliamentary Diplomacy: Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding**," emphasizes the crucial role that legislative bodies currently play or can play in shaping international relations and promoting stability. Parliaments serve as vital platforms for diverse voices to converge, discuss policies, advocate for constituents, and uphold shared values. By extending these deliberations onto the global stage, parliamentary diplomacy enriches diplomatic discourse with democratic legitimacy and grassroots representation.

In order for parliamentary diplomacy to successfully achieve its goals, it is important to strike a balance between reality and perception. It should be firm in upholding universal values and principles, while also respecting the rules and norms that shape not only the international system but also the various cultures and values that make up our diverse world.

The second part of the theme of this conference, **building bridges for peace and understanding**, is one of the fundamental goals of parliamentary diplomacy. Building bridges for peace and understanding requires mutual understanding and dialogue among diverse stakeholders, and engaging in open, honest, and respectful communication. While open, honest, and respectful communication enables individuals and

¹ Vannarith, Chheang (2021), ‘Enhancing Parliamentary Diplomacy for Sustainable Development’, in Prakash, A. (eds.), 13th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit: Multilateral Cooperation for a Resilient, Sustainable and Rules-Based Future for ASEM, Jakarta: ERIA, Phnom Penh: ASEM13 and The Royal Government of Cambodia, pp.185-197.

² Stavridis, 2016: 368.

communities to bridge differences, reconcile, and build trust, dialogue allows people to listen, identify common ground, and collaborate toward solutions. The impact of bridging divides is profound, particularly in fostering peace, stability, and cooperation on both local, regional and global scales.

Historical Context of Parliamentary Diplomacy

Throughout history, diplomacy has been an exclusive area reserved for the Executive and designated specialists. However, the international diplomatic landscape has changed, leading to more involvement by traditionally marginalised actors. New forms of diplomacy have emerged, such as parliamentary diplomacy, environmental diplomacy, resource diplomacy, knowledge diplomacy, transition diplomacy, and global governance diplomacy, among others. This reflects a need to manage state relations by players other than state players.

The roots of parliamentary diplomacy can be traced back to the emergence of representative institutions in ancient civilisations, where elected officials commonly engaged in diplomatic exchanges with neighbouring states. However, the modern concept of parliamentary diplomacy took shape in the 19th century, when Parliamentarians recognised the need for international cooperation and established formal inter-parliamentary organisations.

In 1889, the first Inter-Parliamentary Conference, which was convened in Paris, marked the birth of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU). This laid the foundation for parliamentary diplomacy as a distinct field of diplomatic activity, focusing on promoting dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution among parliamentarians.

Today, the IPU provides a forum for parliamentarians from around the world to come together, exchange ideas, and collaborate on shared challenges, as well as promote democratic values, address global challenges, and advance peace and understanding on a global scale. The IPU also contributes to building a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous world for all.

Parliamentary diplomacy gained prominence after the establishment of the League of Nations, which aimed to promote international cooperation and prevent future conflicts.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union worked closely with the League of Nations to provide parliamentary input and support for its initiatives.

With the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, parliamentary diplomacy gained further prominence. The UN General Assembly recognised the importance of involving parliamentarians in its deliberations, leading to the creation of parliamentary assemblies such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

In short, parliamentary diplomacy has become an integral part of the international diplomatic landscape. Its historical milestones and contributions demonstrate its significance in shaping global affairs and promoting peace, understanding, and cooperation among nations.

The Role of Parliamentarians in Diplomacy

Ladies and gentlemen, Hon. Chairperson and Delegates, it is evident from the discussion held so far that parliamentary diplomacy plays a crucial role in global affairs.

In recent years, parliamentary diplomacy has become a valuable tool for building relationships and promoting cooperation between national parliaments and parliamentary institutions. As a result, many parliaments now encourage their members to participate in inter-parliamentary organisations, bilateral exchanges, and other parliamentary diplomacy initiatives. Through these efforts, Parliamentarians can represent their countries' interests, foster dialogue and cooperation with counterparts from other nations, and work towards building consensus on international issues.

Parliamentarians perform their traditional roles and contribute significantly to global affairs. In this regard, Parliamentarians oversee international negotiations, ratify and enforce international agreements, facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues on international issues, disseminate information on international issues and organizations to citizens, and participate in inter-governmental negotiations and peace-building processes. By doing so, parliamentarians play a critical role in positively shaping global affairs. Treaties and Agreements that are executed by the Executive are required to be ratified by Parliament, if Parliament and the MPs are not involved, they would not understand

or appreciate the issues. This is why the representatives of the people should be keenly and actively involved in the negotiations.

The role of parliamentarians in international relations is particularly important in Africa, especially in the Great Lakes region. In this region, parliamentarians from countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been actively participating in peace-building efforts to resolve conflicts and promote stability. To facilitate dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution initiatives, the Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum on Peace (GALP) has brought together parliamentarians from these countries.

African parliamentarians have played a crucial role in the peace process of South Sudan, a country that has been grappling with conflict since it gained independence in 2011. Parliamentarians from neighboring countries and regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been actively involved in diplomatic efforts to mediate between conflicting parties and advocate for peace agreements. Moreover, they have supported the implementation of peacebuilding measures to ensure lasting peace in the country.

African parliamentarians have been playing a significant role in contributing to peacekeeping missions that are deployed by regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to address conflicts and stabilize fragile states. These parliamentarians provide essential legislative support, oversight, and funding for these missions and advocate for international support and cooperation in peacekeeping efforts.

By affirming our commitment to diplomatic efforts, prioritizing peace and cooperation in parliamentary agendas, and calling for collective action towards building bridges and fostering global harmony, we in Africa can contribute to overcoming the challenges confronting parliamentary diplomacy and advancing the interests of our countries and the continent as a whole.

Conclusion

1. Throughout our discussion, it has become abundantly clear that parliamentary diplomacy plays a crucial and indispensable role in addressing complex global challenges and fostering peace and understanding. From the historical roots of parliamentary engagement in diplomacy to the contemporary challenges facing parliamentarians, it is evident that the involvement of legislative bodies is not just essential, but necessary for effective governance on the international stage. We cannot overlook the key challenges, such as limited resources and political instability that must be addressed to enhance the efficacy of parliamentary diplomacy.
2. One central theme has emerged from our discussion: parliamentary diplomacy is fundamental to building a better world, and there can be no doubt about that. By providing platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and conflict resolution, parliamentarians can bridge divides, promote mutual understanding, and advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflicts. The democratic legitimacy and grassroots representation inherent in parliamentary diplomacy enrich diplomatic discourse and contribute to more inclusive and effective global governance.

As we look toward the future, we must express our deepest gratitude to parliamentarians around the world for their tireless efforts in promoting peace and understanding. Despite the challenges we face, there is hope for a future where nations come together in cooperation and solidarity. We must reaffirm our commitment to diplomatic engagement, prioritise peacebuilding efforts, and foster collaboration among nations, so we can build a more peaceful and prosperous world for generations to come. For democracy, for everyone, leaving no one behind, we move together to build bridges for peace and understanding. Together we can.

I thank you all for the attention.