

**ADDRESS BY  
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AT THE 148TH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION ASSEMBLY  
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It is the great **Martin Luther King Jr** who said that “peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice and brotherhood”.

Parliaments across the world brings together the largest number of the most powerful elected leaders on the planet. This mighty army can easily be the greatest global human agency of change, including, procuring lasting peace and understanding. The IPU, being the largest global association of Parliaments, with its grounding principles that dialogue is central to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, is ideally poised to achieve this objective.

Unfortunately, at this Conference, we failed to harness this energy and marshall our thoughts to condemn the worst human rights tragedy in the world - Gaza and the lack of democracy in Venezuela. These horrendous events, although occurring on opposite sides of the globe, together manifest the deadly havoc that armed conflicts wreaks and the social disorder and human sufferings that the absence of democracy produces.

More than 30,000 are dead in Gaza. Nearly eight million refugees have fled Venezuela.

There is another dimension about Venezuela which I wish to highlight. Venezuela continues to unlawfully claim two thirds of the sovereign territory of its west neighbour Guyana.

This claim by Venezuela was finally and conclusively settled by Arbitration in 1899. Venezuela accepted and acted upon this Arbitral Award for six consecutive decades thereafter. It was not until in the early 1960's when Guyana was about to gain independence from Great Britain that Venezuela made the outrageous claims that the Arbitral Award was unlawful.

It continues to make this outrageous claim to date without producing a scintilla of evidence to substantiate. Right here in Geneva, in 1966, Venezuela signed an Agreement with Guyana, *inter alia*, empowering the United Nations Secretary General to take steps to resolve the controversy. In 2018, exercising those powers, the UN Secretary General referred the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where it remains pending.

Thus far, Venezuela has refused to accept the Court's jurisdiction or to be bound by any order the Court makes. Venezuela has threatened physical invasion and in December 2023 moved a Referendum to annex two-thirds of Guyana's sovereign territory. The ICJ has issued *interim measures* restraining Venezuela from taking further steps in its declared intention.

Every major international organisation in the Western Hemisphere has condemned Venezuela's actions and have called upon Venezuela to respect the jurisdiction of the ICJ, to comply with international law and to employ diplomacy in resolving this alleged dispute. These include the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

(CELAC). Many Governments, including, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Brazil, and those of the Caribbean Region have issued similar statements.

Significantly, by virtue of an intervention brokered by CARICOM and CELAC, the Presidents of Venezuela and Guyana signed an Accord in Argyle, St Vincent in December, 2023, *inter alia*, not to take any steps to escalate this conflict but to resort to diplomacy and dialogue in resolving it.

During all of this, Guyana has emphatically maintained that the matter must be resolved by the ICJ. Further, Guyana has always maintained that diplomacy and dialogue must prevail over threats and confrontation.

Only last week, in breach of both the letter and spirit of the *interim* measures granted at the ICJ and the Argyle Declaration, the Venezuelan Government enacted laws in its Parliament to annex two-thirds of Guyana's sovereign territory.

While time will not permit us at this conference to collectively condemn the actions of Venezuela, there is still much to be done. I appeal to each of you to use the theme of this Conference and the platform of your respective Parliaments to condemn the actions of Venezuela; to demand compliance with International Law; and to call for diplomacy to be used as a bridge for peace and understanding.

This is not a favour to Guyana, but it is discharging a duty we owe to ourselves and indeed the world, if we are to be true to the founding principles of this organisation.