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General Debates on "Parliamentary diplomacy: building bridges for peace and understanding"

Geneva, 25.03.2024

Honorable President,

Dear Colleagues,

The term 'parliament' originates from the idea of discussions or parleys. As a representative of Latvia I, a small country, I would like to bring here the perspective of smaller nations that often find their voices overshadowed in global dialogues.

My country lies on the shores of the Baltic Sea, with close to 2 million inhabitants. Its history, marked by foreign intervention, culminated in the regaining of independence after the collapse of the USSR. Grateful to Latvian politicians and international support, I regard this day of regained sovereignty as the best day of my life.

In 2007, hearing that the Russian president described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century, I felt alarmed. I feared that this regret signalled a desire to regain the lost empire. In 2008, Russia attacked Georgia. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, a peninsula belonging to Ukraine. In 2022, Russia started a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine.

As a person from a small country, I am apprehensive. Such aggressions by a larger country against smaller sovereign states undermine the foundation of international law and the principles upon which the countries funded the United Nations.

We may not allow those violating the rights of the people to prevail since they have more power, a louder voice, and more money for disinformation. Currently, we put so much efforts into defence to protect ourselves and help Ukraine to protect its territory and recover the economy after attacks. At the same time we have so many global challenges - climate change, underfunded healthcare, threats of hunger due to drought, biodiversity loss - this is where we would need to put our efforts. Such aggressive conflicts are costly for the affected country and for all of us since we need to focus on the consequences of conflict instead of combating climate change and investing in healthcare.

Russian delegation asked us during the Women's Parliamentarian forum to condemn the terror act in Moscow. I condemn the terror act. But, please, stop to politicize this terrible attack and use it as a pretext against another country, distributing disinformation.

Why is Russia silent over its behaviour? I condemn Russia's attacks on civilians in Ukraine. Every day, children and women are dying, and thousands are dying due to attacks by Russian military forces. Occupiers deported to Russia twenty thousand Ukrainian children, part of them forcibly adopted, required to lose their identity. In times when we cannot implement our climate change pledges, vast amounts of greenhouse gasses are emitted due to military operations, the production of weapons, operating the hardware and the destructing of infrastructure.

I condemn the terror act by Hamas in Israel on 7th October, and my heart was bleeding for the victims and their families of 7th October. But I will not close my eyes and not see that the shelling of Gaza killed 30 thousands of women and children.

We should not bear any tolerance towards escalation of aggression. The deeds of terrorists can not be a pretext for massive attacks on civilians. I ask for a ceasefire now and continue in a parliamentary way.

Unfortunately, we parliamentarians failed to adopt a resolution addressing these issues yesterday, although most of us agreed on them to a large extent. 4 out of 6 emergency items proposed yesterday addressed it. Why did we fail? We live on one planet. Earth is our typical home. Everything that happens in one region affects others. The brake on international rules in one region encourages violators in other areas. The carbon dioxide emitted in one part of the world warms up another part of the world, bringing tailfins, floods or droughts.

As parliamentarians, we must champion dialogue over conflict, truth over misinformation, and cooperation over division. We shall not bear no tolerance for violators of the rules, and bear solidarity with victims, not the perpetrators. Even if aggressors are influential countries, we shall not trade short-term gains over international rules from which we all benefit in the long term. Together, we can address these global issues, prioritizing the well-being of all nations, large and small.

Thank you for your attention!