

Honorable Madam President, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is, indeed, a great honor for me to address you for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, at a forum with **such a long tradition** and **significant role**, as the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Until recently, I served three terms as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, and I fully intend to put **all my skills and experience at work**, to enhance and further strengthen **parliamentary democracy worldwide**, and nurture the values that this organization has cherished for 135 years.

I strongly believe that **equality between our countries, mutual respect and appreciation**, and **free exchange of opinions** are **the absolute foundation of international relations**.

In an era marked by **rapid changes** and **complex challenges**, the **importance of parliamentary diplomacy cannot be overstated** to guide the world toward a future where **dialogue trumps discord**, and **understanding supersedes conflict**.

**Peace.** It seems that the **world peace has never, in the past 80 years**, been more **fragile** than today.

Which is why we need to remember that: **Peace depends on the respect for international law.**

**In the absence of that respect**, those with more **military might**, or those that have **less to loose**, prevail – leading the world to **perpetual wars, loss of lives, and instability**.

More or less, something that we are increasingly witnessing today.

Thus, as we gather here, **I am compelled** to address a **matter of profound significance** that not only **deeply impacted my nation**, but also **tested the very fabric of international law** and the **foundational principles that govern our collective coexistence**.

I refer to the **NATO aggression** against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which **commenced on this day, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 25 years ago**, in 1999.

This event stands as a stark example of **direct violation of fundamental principles and rules of international law**, including the Charter of the United Nations and all other **imperative norms** that **prohibit the use of force**.

This act of aggression against a sovereign country which did not put as much as foot on another country's territory, acknowledged even by NATO and its member states as **illegal under international law**, yet paradoxically deemed legitimate, was **one of the most critical moments in recent history** where the **established norms of international conduct were openly breached**.

**The arbitrary use of armed force, without the explicit approval from the UN Security Council, except under strictly defined conditions of self-defense, which wasn't the case, is unequivocally prohibited**.

Actions taken by NATO against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia **created a dangerous precedent that still threaten the very order established by the UN Charter**.

At the turn of the century, the unlawful NATO aggression which inflicted immense suffering and devastation upon my country, **resulted in subsequent unilateral declaration of independence** by Priština in 2008, thus representing **a further violation of international norms, the UN Charter, and UN Security Council Resolution 1244**.

It is important to stress that **these events represent the opening of Pandora's box**, unleashing **far-reaching repercussions** felt way beyond our borders for years and decades to follow. We, without any doubt, **witness the ripple effects of those disastrous events unfolding nowadays across Europe and beyond**.

Today, as **tensions escalate** and the **specter of global conflict looms**, it is **imperative that we learn from history** and redouble our efforts to prevent such catastrophic outcomes.

Everyone across the world, **regardless of their size and might**, must steadfastly uphold the principles of international law, **respecting, under any and all circumstances, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of internationally recognizes countries, members of the United Nations, as a fundamental principle of international law**, fostering **dialogue** and **cooperation** as the only pathways to sustainable peace and stability.

**Regardless of international presence, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija endure dire conditions.**

**Over the past year, 13% of the Serbian population has been forced to flee from Kosovo and Metohija.**

**Through the lens of this somber reflection, we are reminded of the paramount importance of parliamentary diplomacy in addressing, resolving, and most crucially, preventing such breaches of international peace and security.**

Parliamentary diplomacy embodies the potential to **build bridges** where **walls might otherwise stand**. By fostering open and honest communication between nations, we can anticipate and resolve conflicts before they escalate, ensuring that **dignity of all states, nations and people** are preserved.

Thank you for your attention and, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, I am very much looking forward to our continued cooperation and partnership.