



**GENERAL DEBATE ON THE THEME: PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY: BUILDING  
BRIDGES FOR PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING**

**HON. SE LUCAS, DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON, OF THE NCOP, PARLIAMENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Honourable President of the Assembly,  
Honourable President of the IPU, Tulia Ackson  
Honourable Presiding Officers,  
Honourable Members; and  
Distinguished guests,

I am honoured to stand before you today to mark the dawn of a new era as we welcome Honourable Dr Tulia Ackson as the new IPU President. Her election stands as a testament to her exemplary leadership and unwavering dedication. I extend my heartfelt congratulations on her election and express my best wishes for her success as she steps into the significant responsibilities and challenges that come with her high office.

**Hon. President**

To achieve sustainable peace, we must bravely confront underlying injustices, which perpetuate inequality and hinder human development. It is with this profound understanding that we have gathered here today, to address the urgent need to broker lasting peace and understanding, particularly in conflict-stricken regions. It is the responsibility of this leadership collective present in this august house today, to build a new social and political order, by actively seeking new ways for us to build bridges for peace and understanding, amongst and between nations, through parliamentary diplomacy.

As the world goes through a difficult period of deepened international turbulence, where global peace is threatened by polarization, it is upon us, as the custodians of democracy and peace, to ensure that we use every possible avenue available to us, to foster lasting

peace and cohesion amongst all the nations of the world, through dialogue, consensus-building and negotiation.

This we cannot accomplish by picking sides, instead we must create a platform for everyone to be heard, without judgement, to ensure that we broker new constructs of understanding and empathy, even where deeply divergent views have been held.

### **Distinguished Delegates and members of the IPU**

The people of Palestine have endured a lack of peace and security for the past 76 years and this is a situation in dire need of redress. It is in this spirit that the South African Government, as a State party to the Genocide Convention, has sought legal intervention to prevent further devastation in Gaza, an area witnessing one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st century.

As we reflect on these stark realities, I am reminded of the profound words of Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh (Blih neh nee Hrah), who described this as the first genocide in history broadcasted in real-time by its victims. This tragic circumstance compels us to urgently support initiatives that can deliver enduring peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. It is imperative that we keep channels of communication and dialogue open, to unequivocally advocate for a two-state solution.

### **Hon President,**

South Africa welcomes the International Court of Justice's firm and legally binding provisional measures on Israel, requiring it to do everything within its power to prevent genocidal acts during the conflict in Gaza. Consequently, Third States are now mandated to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Genocide Convention, ensuring that they do not aid or abet genocidal actions. This measure places a significant obligation on all parliaments to exercise their constitutional duty, ensuring that their governments refrain from contributing to genocidal acts. We need to now put measures in place as the *IPU*, to ensure that we collectively oversee the implementation of the *ICJ provisional measures on Israel*, while establishing other mechanisms to address issues including the matter of detainees, hostages and build consensus around how we can begin to systematically segment these issues, to address them with the urgency they deserve.

As I reflect on South Africa's participation in the IPU's Task Force on the Russia-Ukraine Conflict, it becomes clear that it has provided a meaningful opportunity to pursue processes, towards the cessation of hostilities and seek a diplomatic solution through dialogue and consensus building.

**Hon President,**

Looking ahead, it is imperative that the IPU maintains similar urgency in establishing task forces/missions to address conflicts that have beset IPU Member States. Given the ICJ pronouncements on the Israel and Palestine matter, this may be an opportune time to establish a task force, to ensure the speedy implementation of the legally binding pronouncements of the ICJ.

I urge you **Hon President**, to consider establishing the appropriate mechanisms or structures, to oversee the implementation of the provisions of the ICJ. This must also be viewed in line with the Oversight mandate of an important body such as the IPU, which must employ every available mechanism, within the confines of its mandate, to ensure an adherence to international law, particularly, as prescribed, in this case, by the legally binding pronouncements of the ICJ. This must be prioritized as a matter of urgency, as we continue to build on the progress that has been made during this week, when we intentionally sought to build consensus through dialogue, in our consideration of the emergency item.

In addition, I wish to urge parliaments to call on their respective governments to await the results of the ongoing investigation by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, before considering any decisions to suspend funding to the Agency. It is crucial that we base our actions on the outcome of this investigation, to ensure that essential humanitarian aid and support continues uninterrupted for those in need.

**Hon. President**

Polarisation becomes detrimental to any democratic State when it divides the people into two mutually distrustful parties, leading to political leaders sacrificing democratic principles to retain power. Changing this vicious cycle into a virtuous one requires

enacting laws to promote inclusivity, equal rights, and non-discrimination, fostering dialogue across party lines, supporting educational programs that promote diversity, and collaborating with civil society organizations to ensure social cohesion and inclusivity. In light of our nation's historical journey, South Africa recognises the urgent need for parliamentary diplomacy as a means of building bridges for peace and understanding. We stand ready, as a nation that has experienced the devastating impact of polarisation through legislated apartheid, to work collaboratively with others in addressing similar challenges around the world. I therefore want to appeal to the moral convictions of the leaders of member parliaments represented in this house today, to use the power and influence at your disposal, working together with us, to find a peaceful solution, to the ~~war~~ <sup>situation/crisis in Gaza</sup> between Israel and Palestine. It is indeed in line with the mandate of the IPU, to ensure that we actively build bridges for peace and understanding amongst the nations of the world. If we fail in executing this objective, we would have failed in executing an imperative mandate of the IPU assembly.

#### **Hon. President**

As parliamentarians, we possess the means to cultivate positive international relations through parliamentary diplomacy. Within the South African Parliament, we have effectively implemented various practices designed to strengthen international ties. A notable example is our successful hosting of the 9th BRICS Parliamentary Forum in September 2023, which culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, formally establishing the parliamentary dimension of BRICS cooperation. This signifies our unwavering commitment to addressing mutual concerns and fortifying inter-parliamentary relations among BRICS Member States. Furthermore, our active participation in multilateral forums, including the one we are attending today, continues to provide opportunities to deepen strategic relations and to positively redefine old relationships, even where deep rifts have existed for decades and centuries. As parliamentarians and custodians of human rights and peace, we must continue to be guided by the objectives of the IPU, as we seek to address global challenges, share best practices, and advocate for and build consensus around common interests, thereby amplifying our impact on the world stage.

Moreover, we have a duty to champion human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, advocating for fundamental freedoms and democratic values worldwide through

parliamentary avenues. In addition, our collaboration with civil society organizations is instrumental in empowering our efforts to support international development initiatives, provide humanitarian aid, and engage in peace-building endeavours.

In conclusion, as parliamentarians, by embracing and implementing these good practices, we contribute to fostering peaceful and collaborative international relations. Through our dedicated efforts in parliamentary diplomacy, we facilitate understanding, collaboration, and constructive engagement on the global stage. It is by championing these values that we further the cause of peace and understanding, demonstrating our shared commitment to building a more harmonious and equitable world.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to these efforts.