



PARLIAMENT OF UGANDA

Parliamentary Diplomacy: Building Bridges for Peace and Understanding:

**148TH INTER PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU) ASSEMBLY AND
RELATED MEETINGS**

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**IPU President,
President of the 148th IPU Assembly,
The IPU Secretary General,
Speakers/Presidents/Presiding Officers,
Deputy Speakers/Presidents/Presiding Officers,
Leaders of Delegations,
Colleagues,
Distinguished Participants,**

I am glad that the 148th IPU Assembly has primarily focused on pathways to peace through parliamentary diplomacy. I associate with the theme of this Assembly and its attendant objectives: - *'Parliamentary diplomacy: building bridges for peace and understanding'* challenges us as parliamentarians from around the world to take centre stage in the effort to bring world peace. We are alive to the fact that any form of development cannot happen in the absence of peace.

Fellow delegates, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 56 countries experienced armed conflict in 2023, this Assembly will provide a platform for parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy at the global, regional and bilateral levels, as a complement to the United Nations and other multilateral forums. On that note allow me to say that I am glad that the IPU's various parliamentary bodies focused on conflict situations are meeting here in person in Geneva, including the IPU Task Force for the peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine, The IPU Committee on Middle East Questions as well as the IPU Group of Facilitators on Cyprus. This is a demonstration of Parliamentary Diplomacy.

Let me first of all highlight the facts that Parliamentary Diplomacy in peace-building are indisputable given the center stage parliaments hold in democratic governance.

Parliaments play a crucial role when states transition from war towards peace. Parliaments are an important arena for the inclusion of warring parties, and the resulting interactions could either aid or hinder the consolidation of peace.

Former enemies, or their elected representatives, are expected to meet and even work together in post-conflict Parliaments and we have seen this happen World over with wonderful results in building and entrenching democracy. Parliamentary Diplomacy holds the potential for leading to the discovery of new, peaceful ways of resolving disputes. Parliaments are moreover an arena where hitherto underrepresented communities and marginalized groups can seek formal political representation via elections and be given a voice.

A few studies confirm the expectations of Parliamentary Diplomacy in building bridges for peace and understanding. On notable study by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) titled *Supporters, spoilers or sidelined* holds that Parliaments are integral for post-war governance and instrumental in securing successful implementation of peace agreements and long-term quality of peace. Parliaments play a number of key roles in peacebuilding:

- Parliaments have the ultimate legal responsibility for the implementation of peace agreements, including institutional reform.
- Parliaments' have a formal role in relation to peacebuilding, such as supporting transitional justice and integration of former armed groups and across the main conflict cleavages.
- In the long-term, Parliaments can govern in support of peace, become sites of national dialogue and hold the executive to account

Fellow Delegates, allow me to highlight a little more on the power of Parliamentary Diplomacy as a bridge for peace and understanding especially if properly and fully utilized. Parliaments have the legal responsibility for the implementation of peace agreements and decision-making on policy that impacts peace. Colombia's Congress, for instance, did so on the 24th of November 2016. In terms of the implementation of such agreements, I wish to applaud the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for leading the limited work that has brought attention to the significance of Parliaments.

The IPU stressed parliament's role in judicial reform. Parliaments make the legal frameworks that underpin vetting individuals for their suitability for office and thus are central in ensuring that individual guilt is punished with ascribing collective guilt to identity groups

Further, governments need to establish bodies to promote human rights, namely 'civilian oversight bodies to monitor the military, anti-corruption entities, specialized courts, and national human rights bodies and ombudsmen's offices' while also delivering human rights training to public servants.

Parliaments also play an important role in other aspects of institutional reform; devolved institutions, can be created by parliamentary decision. The 2001 peace agreement in Papua New Guinea was legislated through the national parliament and, among other things, gave huge prerogatives to Bougainville's autonomous institutions even in matters of foreign policy and defence.

Security sector reform is another enormously important part of peacebuilding and parliaments are likely to need to legislate for it. Fellow delegates (and I stand to be corrected by colleagues from Nepal), in the case of Nepal, the 2011 Seven Point Agreement among parliamentarians addressed integrating paramilitary combatants into a unified army under democratic oversight.

Similarly, parliaments have played an important role in the establishment and support of truth commissions; even in cases where it may not at first be apparent. A number of truth commissions have been established directly by parliaments, but even where these commissions have been founded by the Executives, the legal reality has often been that legislatures were still involved. In Nepal again, here executive powers were used to found a truth commission, but only pursuant to legislative branch recommendations. Moreover, their involvement is sometimes subtle, such as when representatives of parliamentary parties acted as part of the consultative mechanism for appointing commissioners in South Africa. Truth commissions may suggest anything from compensation schemes to wholesale institutional reform, any of which require parliaments to legislate.

I am happy to note that the IPU points to the significance of parliamentary oversight. It calls for parliaments to use their oversight powers to ensure that amnesty is a step of last resort and, when it is unavoidable, allow only the minimum amnesty required to be implemented. More generally, there is a strong correlation between the 'level of democracy' and the legal and implied powers of the parliament; this in turn suggests, among other things, that the ability to hold the executive branch to account is an important aspect of democratization.

Furthermore, Parliaments, through their discursive and deliberative set-up, are well suited to provide for the inclusion of important social groups in decision-making and this an important pre-requisite for peace building. Sometimes a peace agreement mandates the inclusion of reserved seats, as was the case in Kosovo.

In my conclusion, I wish to re-iterate and highlight the key messages that I wished reflect in my submission.

- Parliaments have a critical role to play in crisis prevention and recovery.
- Legitimately elected parliaments provide a forum for the concerns of diverse societal actors (including women and minority groups) to be aired and incorporated in processes of dialogue, reconstruction and conflict resolution.
- Following conflict, elections should never be viewed as an exit strategy for external actors. Elections are part of a process for furthering democratic governance and may be rendered meaningless if support to democratic institutions such as national parliaments is inadequate or ill-conceived.
- After conflict, parliamentary institutions often remain weak in relation to the executive, armed groups and other non-state actors. Building effective democratic governance requires correcting this imbalance. External actors have a role to play assisting in the timely strengthening of parliaments.
- Parliaments are by no means a panacea for resolving conflict or building lasting peace. Flawed peace agreements, weak political parties and

corrupt political elites are all factors that can undermine parliament's positive contribution to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

- Parliaments have a fundamental role to play in peacebuilding processes, including oversight of reconstruction, legislating human rights guarantees and addressing post-conflict security issues

Fellow Delegates, I hope that by the end of this Assembly, we shall have come up with solid, well thought-out and implementable resolutions so that together we avoid armed conflict in the democratic world.