

**Speech by Mr. Ari Koponen, Chair of the Finnish delegation at the 150th IPU Assembly in Geneva on the general debate theme:**

***Parliamentary action for social development and justice***

Dear colleagues, Fellow Parliamentarians,

we have gathered here in beautiful Uzbekistan to talk about something that's at the heart of every representative of the people – how we, as parliaments, can practically advance social development and justice.

Social development means a society that evolves to better serve its people, bringing well-being and fair rules. It's about making sure everyone has access to proper education, healthcare, jobs, and safety nets. But how can a parliament push this forward? Parliament is the voice of the people, the forger of laws, and the guardian of justice. It's the force that ensures the will of ordinary folks is carried out and that justice stands tall. I'll break this into three parts.

First, parliament has to ensure that outdated laws are updated and the legal system protects people from discrimination and injustice. Justice isn't a perk for the elite – it's a basic right for every Finn.

Second, we need to secure freedom of speech, the right to speak your mind, and access to fair legal proceedings. In a just country, no one has to fear opening their mouth or standing up for themselves.

Third, we lawmakers must keep authorities and the police in check. Abuses of power need to be investigated, and if things aren't working, the laws need to be fixed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to highlight a few things that are cornerstones of social development in Finland: education, nature and trust.

First, education, which is close to my heart. As the vice chair of the Education and Culture Committee, I'm proud to say that in Finland, every child gets a free and high-quality education, no matter their background. Our teachers are valued, well-trained, and free to focus on raising balanced citizens – not just test-taking machines. This investment has put us at the top of the world in literacy and numeracy.

Second, nature. In Finland, we have clean and beautiful nature – forests, lakes, and air that's worth breathing. Social development isn't just about people; it's about taking care of the nature that gives us the foundation for life. Clean waters and forests improve our quality of life and keep us healthy.

Finally, trust. Our society runs on people trusting each other, the parliament, and our leaders. Corruption is minimal, things are handled openly, and Finns believe that by working together, we'll make it. That's why Finland has been the world's happiest country for eight years straight.

Dear colleagues,

we parliamentarians can and must act for social development and justice in a straightforward way, listening to the people and working for everyone's good. Thank you!