

**Jana SIMANOVSKA,**

Head of the **Latvian** National Group to the IPU

General Debates on "**Parliamentary action for social development and justice**"

Tashkent, April, 2024

Dear Colleagues!

We represent our people who elected us to represent them and address their needs. However, globally, democracy is in decline, with many electing leaders who limit their rights, freedoms, and participation. Why?

Studies by the World Bank, Freedom House, and OECD indicate that social insecurity, inequality, and disinformation contribute to declining trust in democratic institutions and rising populism. Sometimes, politicians focus too much purely on economic growth. However, prioritising gross national product while neglecting issues of inequality fosters social insecurity and undermines societal cohesion. High levels of inequality increase the risks of political instability and hinder economic growth. Sustainable growth must address disparities in income and opportunity, ensuring that economic progress benefits all segments of society.

Also, climate change-induced insecurity fosters xenophobia and authoritarianism, where disinformation targets economically and socially insecure people, exploiting their desire for simple explanations for complex problems. Another alarming consequence is that youth are becoming apathetic to policy-making and do not see a future where their voices are heard.

So, what can we do? I believe that a stronger commitment to social justice and reducing inequality is essential. Therefore, in Latvia, as in many other countries, we focus on these questions, and we have also achieved tangible progress:

- Ensuring universal social protection and services for the most vulnerable. In Latvia, we established a universal basket of social services and are working toward enabling finances for affordable housing and improving access to medicine.
- Implementing progressive income taxation to reduce inequality. Latvia has recently taken steps to ensure a more progressive tax system benefiting 80% of working people especially with lower income.
- Initiated by our President, we started discussion on expanding public participation mechanisms, such as referendums, to strengthen public trust in democratic institutions. In Latvia, we actively seek ways to enhance citizen engagement in decision-making processes. We have a digital and open government and parliament.

- We work extensively to combat disinformation and ensure fair elections with transparency and limited monetary influence.
- Another key area is the involvement of youth in policy-making, offering their participation in political processes via the Youth Parliament and earlier election observers from the age of 16.

Besides our work within the country, international justice is equally important. Democracy's decline in one country is also a threat to others. Research shows that the risk of authoritarian countries threatening their neighbours is much higher. Furthermore, the international rights system is a shield for us all. Over 600 million people in small countries, 5 billion in developing countries, and over 1 billion threatened by climate change depend on global frameworks for protection. If the international system collapses, injustice and conflict will flourish. Upholding these frameworks is essential for billions' survival.

Therefore, Latvia supports the joint efforts for social justice and international cooperation to secure our democratic freedoms.

Thank you for your attention!