

General Debate – Complying with humanitarian principles and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis.

Mr President, honourable colleagues,

our debate on compliance with humanitarian principles and on supporting humanitarian action is not a theoretical drill, rather an absolute must, politically and morally speaking. Nowadays, the basic foundations of international humanitarian law are significantly wavering, pitted against crises that are multiplying, in every continent. But no recent image is more disquieting than the one of Israel and Palestine.

Since 7 October 2023, the civil population in Gaza has been experiencing a gargantuan humanitarian tragedy. Thousands of civilian innocents – women, children, the elderly – have been either killed or wounded. Over two million people in the Gaza Strip have endured unbearable living conditions, with limited access to food, water, medicines and healthcare. Hospitals and schools have been bombed, humanitarian workers and doctors have been killed while fulfilling their duties.

Likewise, we cannot overlook the suffering of the Israeli families victims of the terrible terrorist attacks of 7 October, who suffered the tragic loss of innocent lives and the terrible situation of the hostages.

Today we are witnessing a gradual erosion of international humanitarian law, not only in the Middle East, but in several regions of the world. In Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, the Sahel: the violation of humanitarian principles is dramatically on the rise, and the international community often seems to be powerless.

Yet international humanitarian law is clear, non-negotiable and binding for all, under all circumstances. No cause, however legitimate it may be, can justify the violation of its basic principles. Neither the fight against terror, nor national security can be a pretext for striking innocent people, for indiscriminately attacking civilians, for weaponising hunger.

In times like these, marked by a lack of faith in multilateralism, Parliaments may act as bridges, connecting divided societies, sceptical governments, wounded peoples. We must reassert the pivotal role of multilateral cooperation, as well as the role of international institutions – particularly the United Nations, the International

Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian agencies – in ensuring the protection of civilians and access to aid.

In the case of Israel and Palestine, the recent Israel-Hamas peace agreement, brokered by the United States, Egypt, Qatar and other regional players, has opened up a crucial window of hope. On the past 13 October we witnessed with joy the release of the Israeli hostages and the exchange with Palestinian detainees. At the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, over 20 world leaders signed a declaration of intent, formalising a ceasefire agreement, taking a first, tangible step towards reconstruction in Gaza and devising the idea of a provisional government for the Gaza Strip, run by a technical-operational committee that may ensure basic services, infrastructure and security.

However, the real challenge will be that of converting formal undertakings into real action, on the ground. Pledges are an important step, but they alone cannot appease the trauma, rebuild cities, schools, hospitals, nor restore security and trust among both populations.

That is why it is paramount to set up, straight away, effective and transparent supervision mechanisms, capable of guaranteeing a just and lasting peace.

As parliamentarians, we must, among other things: monitor our governments, making sure that foreign, business and defence policies are consistent with the international duties we have committed to; promote, in our parliaments, laws that forbid the exportation of armament to theatres where humanitarian law risks being breached; ensure unwavering support to humanitarian organisations.

Furthermore, it is our duty to counter polarisation and misinformation, which foster hatred and hinder all political solutions. The language of dehumanisation lays the foundations for atrocities, and that's why we too are responsible for the public debate.

Thank you.