

## **“Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis”**

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Dear friends, 5 minutes is not a lot, but as I have the chance to speak to Parliamentarians from countries all over the world, I decided that today I will not fill my speech with beautiful words about humanitarian diplomacy but talk about something that I am truly worried about: the danger of dehumanisation.

Climate change brings with it social insecurity and an increase in competition for resources. This fight for survival is dangerous for societies, because it is easy to lose compassion and respect within it. And we have experienced this.

When colonial powers expanded across other continents, they dehumanised and destroyed Indigenous peoples. We have condemned this.

When, at the start of the last century, the *doctrine* of so-called “living space” — *Lebensraum* — turned into an ideology of domination and racial superiority, it led to the Second World War, to unprecedented atrocities, and to the loss of millions of lives. We have condemned this.

But have we learned from this?

At the core of imperialism is the idea that one group, their belief or ideology, is worth more than others. That idea returns whenever oppressors try to dehumanise those they aim to subjugate or destroy.

Unfortunately, we see this pattern repeating in conflicts across the world — invaders kill, displace, and drive people from their homes, claiming “special rights” to their land or identity. The Russian aggression against Ukraine was preceded by a campaign that sought to defame the Ukrainian people and to justify Russia’s so-called “special rights” over Ukrainian territory.

We are also witnessing unbearable human suffering in Gaza, where civilians are being killed and displaced — another tragic example of how narratives of entitlement and dehumanisation perpetuate cycles of violence.

At the same time, we see growing attempts to manipulate societies through influence operations and disinformation — and once again, the first step is dehumanization, when a group of people is labelled as a disease, as animals, or as filth.

But now about us - parliamentarians.

Two years ago, here in Geneva, I heard a representative of one nation use deeply demeaning language to describe the people of another nation. Many in the room shouted or expressed disapproval — yet that was all we did. I found that moment deeply disturbing. It reminded me how easily words can dehumanize, and how silence in the face of such language can make us complicit.

*Because words spoken by us – representatives of nations – carry weight and can either heal or harm. We must draw lines between humanity and hate, and we must recognize and oppose hate speech*

All people are equal. Our nations have a right to self-determination.

We cannot tolerate hate speech or the humiliation of other peoples, neither here nor in our countries.

But today there is another world that affects us all - the digital world. It exceeds borders and within it we surrender our most precious resources - time and attention. Yet rules in this world are often not set by *democratic institutions representing* society, but by a few private actors - "monarchs" of social media - who shape what we see and what we believe, and whose algorithms, in the name of profit, amplify hate speech, depriving the human face of both nations and groups of people.

So, I urge this: do not tolerate hate speech, whether in the real or digital space. Let's work together so that democracy prevails online as well, with rules set by society and not by a few digital monarchs.

Humanity cannot be taken for granted. We have to protect it, and we have to do it every day - on the battlefield, online and in our own hearts. And in how we treat one another, here.