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Written statement from Ms. Anu Vehviläinen, Speaker of the Parliament of Finland

Parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet

Ladies and gentlemen, dear fellow Speakers of Parliament,

Let me begin by thanking our Austrian hosts and the IPU for arranging the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in the beautiful city of Vienna. I would have very much liked to address the Conference in person, but unfortunately domestic Parliamentary obligations prevent me from doing that.

Dear colleagues, multilateralism as I know it, is all about forming alliances in pursuit of common goals. It is about coming together to achieve important targets that otherwise would be impossible for countries to reach alone. Furthermore, the goals are mutually beneficial, often universal by nature. Peace and sustainable development are such goals.

Vitally important UN-led multilateral processes like the Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change negotiations, the Convention on Biological Diversity or the International Vaccines Alliance, to name just a few, are designed to address global challenges. For these we need to have every nation on board. Yet we can see multilateralism under attack on many fronts. But what is the alternative? Unilateral action is no answer to global challenges. Understandably there are situations where the initial focus is within national borders as we have seen with the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this should not prevent us from taking a broader perspective and contributing to multilateral action. This will benefit the weakest and ultimately also ourselves. As we know, no-one is safe until everyone is safe.

There are various ways of making policy in different countries around the world, but open debate on all societal matters has been a cornerstone of parliamentary democracy for centuries – including multilateral cooperation. Free media and a well-educated people are key enablers for a transparent and democratic legislative process. It is the responsibility of the parliamentary leadership to allocate sufficient time to discuss these important issues openly and to offer the public an opportunity to form their opinion. And in the end, it is for the people to decide through democratic processes.

I wish you a successful conference and fruitful deliberations. Thank you!