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### Concept note for the General Debate on the theme: *Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, supported by other international human rights and humanitarian law treaties and standards, states that the basis for freedom, justice and peace in the world is the recognition of the equal and inalienable rights of all individuals, without discrimination on any grounds, including culture, race, colour, language, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or political affiliation.

Societies that are inclusive and where rights are upheld are more likely to be cohesive, peaceful and democratic. According to the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP), acceptance of the rights of others and good relations with neighbours are aspects of positive peace that contribute to peaceful societies. Further data indicates that trust between communities translates to greater trust in institutions and greater resilience to conflict.<sup>1</sup> Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies is an important pillar of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is also a major focus of the IPU Strategy.

Despite this evidence, the world is becoming a more divided and less tolerant and peaceful place. The 2022 Global Peace Index reveals that the world is at its lowest point of peacefulness in the last 15 years.

There are numerous indicators that peaceful coexistence and inclusion worldwide are in decline, and that intolerance and discrimination are on the rise. According to the Global Peace Index, the rise of violent demonstrations throughout 2022 pointed to increasing polarization, criticism of administrative structures and a decrease in tolerance towards diverging views. Online hate speech continues to sow division and is increasing against minorities, according to a 2021 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>2</sup> In addition, trust in government and the media worldwide is diminishing, religious freedoms are being curtailed, and religious discrimination, racism and xenophobia are rising.

These expressions of intolerance or exclusion are intricately connected with global trends of growing social and economic inequalities, deteriorating trust in democracy and human rights standards, the curtailing of rights, and growing threats to peace and security through violent extremism or the spread of misinformation. All of this threatens social cohesion and global peace.

Working towards overcoming intolerance and promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies requires a comprehensive response from different stakeholders. Parliaments must play a crucial role as representatives of the people, and parliamentarians as the voice by which grievances and concerns, but also needs and desires, are expressed.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SC2\\_Framework-copy.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SC2_Framework-copy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/03/report-online-hate-increasing-against-minorities-says-expert>

The key functions of parliaments – law-making, budgeting, representation and oversight – make them the guardians of the rule of law, citizenship, human rights and justice. Despite the current threats to co-existence worldwide, parliaments have an important role to play in helping societies become more inclusive and peaceful, by protecting rights and leading by example.

The IPU's commitment to promoting cohesion and inclusion is part of its core mandate to work "for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the solid establishment of representative institutions". This is embedded in its current Strategy, which views parliaments as part of broader ecosystems for democracy.

The IPU has frequently addressed issues of inclusion, coexistence and peace in its Assembly declarations, publications and activities.<sup>3</sup> The Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world* in 2012 recognized the importance of balancing respect for diversity with social inclusiveness and cohesion as a means of building trust within and among societies and as a precondition for progress, prosperity and a high quality of life. The St. Petersburg Declaration in 2017 on *Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue* recognized that dialogue between faiths, cultures and ethnicities is essential to peace and cultural pluralism and that, as representatives of the people, the world's parliaments are committed to strengthening normative processes and legal frameworks.

The current IPU Strategy encourages a policy focus on key global challenges, namely climate change; democracy, human rights, gender equality and youth participation; peace and security; and sustainable development for all. The issues of inclusion and peace cut across each of these issues. In recent years, the IPU has especially laid emphasis on promoting peaceful coexistence between religions, beliefs, cultures and ethnicities, as part of its peacebuilding and counter-terrorism programmes.

The General Debate will provide an opportunity for the parliamentary community to identify the factors underlying intolerance and division locally and globally, and to share good practices about sustainable and comprehensive approaches to promoting inclusion and supporting peaceful coexistence, in order to build resilient and cohesive societies.

To make the General Debate as meaningful, concrete and action-oriented as possible, Member Parliaments are invited to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the key drivers of intolerance or exclusion in your society and what actions has your parliament taken to address these?
- (2) What kinds of factors promote coexistence between different groups, and how is your parliament encouraging these?
- (3) How could your parliament be more inclusive in its work?
- (4) What role could collective parliamentary action play in helping address drivers of intolerance or promote inclusion and peaceful coexistence?

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<sup>3</sup> See *Promoting Inclusive Parliaments: The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament* – <http://archive.ipu.org/splz-e/chiapas10/overview.pdf> .