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For democracy. For everyone.

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Geneva Declaration (draft)

Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding

We, Members of Parliament from around the world, gathered together at the 148th IPU Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, reaffirm our commitment to parliamentary diplomacy to address the growing challenges to peace and international security.

We are meeting at a time of great turbulence and instability. From the resurgence of conflicts and geopolitical tensions, the increase in social polarization and a looming new global arms race, to the devastating impacts of climate change and the dangers posed by artificial intelligence – the multi-faceted and intractable challenges we face underscore the urgency for a collective, forward-looking and durable response that learns from the past and goes beyond conventional solutions. As we navigate this intricate landscape, it becomes increasingly evident that addressing these complex challenges demands a shared global commitment to building a resilient foundation for lasting peace, rooted in the upholding of human rights and democratic principles.

We conclude this Assembly recognizing the potential of parliamentary diplomacy, grounded in dialogue, mutual respect and the achievement of common goals, as an important means to build trust, promote cooperation, share good practices, and enhance the contribution of parliaments and parliamentarians to building lasting world peace. We recognize that the tools of parliamentary diplomacy include bilateral and multilateral associations, such as inter-parliamentary institutions, staff exchanges and friendship groups. We welcome the work of the IPU to help foster political dialogue conducive to peacebuilding and the peaceful resolution of conflict, and encourage the IPU to continue its efforts in this regard. We also call upon the IPU to support and accompany a return to the rule of law in countries, many of them on the African continent, which have undergone an unconstitutional dissolution of parliament.

As representatives of the people, we parliamentarians are keenly aware of our responsibility to build bridges of understanding among nations, bring peace to citizens and find consensus on how to overcome joint hurdles. Parliamentarians further have an active role to play in ensuring that efforts to negotiate peace processes, treaties and other international agreements are rooted in the needs of the people, taking into account traditional wisdoms and values. In addition, we recognize that parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to ensure compliance with the rule of law and international norms, which are essential prerequisites for restoring the conditions for peaceful coexistence and alleviating the growing fragmentation of societies and the multilateral system.

We condemn all human rights violations arising during conflict as well as all breaches of the basic rules, principles and core tenets of international law, in particular international humanitarian law. In this regard we must pay particular attention to the situation of young people who, when faced with disruption in their formative years, risk growing up as a lost generation, and to recognizing the vital role that women can and should play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Parliamentary diplomacy is a crucial tool in empowering parliamentarians to actively promote and safeguard these rights and standards at the national level, as well as to advance democratic principles and human rights standards worldwide.

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Furthermore, we seek to prioritize the safeguarding of human rights by emphasizing the importance of ratifying and effectively implementing international humanitarian law and human rights instruments at the national level as a critical step in ensuring that those entitled to protection genuinely benefit from it. Likewise, we agree to work to disseminate international humanitarian law as widely as possible to the population as a whole, to provide gender-sensitive training to armed and security forces on this subject and to step up the accountability of these forces for their actions.

We strongly reiterate our commitment to upholding the rule of law, both domestically and internationally, as the cornerstone of conflict prevention and resolution, as well as our belief in dialogue and diplomacy as an indispensable tool to achieve enduring peace. We urge all States, especially those parties to an armed conflict, to adhere strictly to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, with no exceptions. Additionally, we advocate for increased recourse to the International Court of Justice and other international judicial institutions as essential mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes between nations.

We condemn the recent surge in identity-based hatred around the world, particularly religious hatred, and regret the political polarization that is helping to drive this phenomenon. We advocate for holistic dialogue processes that involve representatives of religions, beliefs and faith-based organizations to effectively complement existing efforts to mitigate violence and promote peace, inclusion and understanding. We commit to continuing our work to achieve the recommendations outlined in the Marrakesh Communiqué, the outcome document of the IPU's Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, held in June 2023.

There is a close link between peace and development. The deterioration of peace and the escalation in the frequency and severity of conflicts within and between countries jeopardizes development gains and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Vulnerable, marginalized and underrepresented members of society, such as women, youth, children, the elderly, the poor, indigenous people, minorities, and persons with disabilities, are disproportionately impacted by conflict, which further exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, such as unequal access to socio-economic and political rights. One such manifestation of this is in the radicalization by extremist groups of at-risk and often under-employed youth in fragile, conflict-affected States, undermining national security.

Our focus should be on tackling the underlying causes of conflict, which are often rooted in economic inequality and discrimination against entire groups. The well-being of the most vulnerable is a good litmus test for the health of society at large. Therefore, it is imperative to address the specific needs of at-risk members of the population by embracing inclusive solutions that simultaneously preserve their dignity, reduce their exposure to the detrimental impacts of conflict and provide the conditions for them to realize their socioeconomic potential. We should therefore increase our focus on human security, which encompasses citizens' protection by prioritizing essential needs such as food, health care and environmental security, and on guaranteeing equal rights for all, as the main path to fostering both peace and development.

We must monitor the early warning signs of potential conflicts both locally and nationally and take adequate action to prevent escalation, foster dialogue and cooperation, and ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. In this vein, we recognize our responsibility to promote conflict prevention through a focus on disarmament, reducing military spending, shifting budget priorities to better address the root causes of conflict, and holding governments to account – including by challenging their use of emergency powers to wage war. We also need to work towards the demilitarization of cyberspace and artificial intelligence, so that they can instead be used to open up spaces for scientific breakthroughs, international cooperation and peace.

Since parliamentarians are well-placed to play the role of impartial mediators, to facilitate dialogue to prevent or de-escalate conflict or to restore peace, we also pledge to redouble our efforts to resolve conflicts through the exercise of parliamentary diplomacy. We reaffirm our commitment to preventing a relapse of large-scale disputes in post-conflict situations, including through enacting, overseeing and monitoring the implementation of peace agreements and ensuring they are accompanied by adequate funding for basic health care services, mental health support, transitional justice and institutional reforms. We further commit to addressing past and current discord through bolstering citizen engagement and ensuring that perspectives from the full breadth of civil society and civic institutions are heard.

We are committed to fostering the more substantial involvement of women and youth in politics and leadership roles, including in the military and security sectors. We commit ourselves to the effective implementation of the women, peace and security, and youth, peace and security agendas of the UN Security Council by ensuring that peace processes, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict prevention integrate a gender perspective and guarantee the equal and meaningful participation of women and youth. We also will strive to take all necessary measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls, especially against women in politics, as well as conflict-related gender-based violence and violence against minority and marginalized groups. Moreover, we commit to providing assistance to survivors of such violence, recognizing the importance of inclusivity and gender-sensitive approaches in creating a more equitable and secure environment.

Today's challenges transcend borders and demand a collective global response. As members of parliament, we agree on the importance of restoring trust in multilateralism. Further, it is only through international cooperation and upholding the rule of law that we can address growing risks, build solidarity and, through a common security approach, find lasting solutions to establish a shared sense of security, where all nations feel safe, leading to a more secure world for future generations. Essential to the credibility and success of all these efforts is ensuring that the attention and resources devoted to responding to global challenges are commensurate with their severity and not motivated by geopolitical interests, bearing in mind the equal rights, dignity and value of each human life.

Finally, as we mark the 135th anniversary of the IPU, we reconfirm our commitment to inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation, and we emphasize the IPU's unique role as the parliamentary counterpart to the United Nations. As we look ahead to the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024, we call on all Member Parliaments to help advance UN reform and to further strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the work of the UN. In turn, we shall take this Declaration back to our respective parliaments, disseminate the outcome of our collective work to our national authorities, and seek to mark the International Day of Parliamentarism (30 June, which coincides with the anniversary of the IPU) through a dedicated event in our respective parliaments.

As parliamentarians, we commit to lead the way towards a more peaceful world, pursuing tenacious, evidence-based and original approaches, and drawing on the experiences of all members of the global parliamentary community. We therefore pledge to do our utmost, individually and collectively, to protect and promote peace for all.