

General Debate – IPU Assembly

Strengthening international law: Parliamentary roles and mechanisms, and the contribution of regional cooperation

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Tena koutou katoa. Greetings colleagues.

I am Anne Tolley, Deputy Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives. It's my pleasure to contribute to this Assembly's General Debate, on a topic that affects all the legislatures that are represented here today.

In a world that is increasingly marked by division and conflict, the need for parliaments and global institutions to cooperate is more important than ever. As the theme for this General Debate suggests, the international legal order is one of the foundations on which we can nurture peace and security around the world.

All of us here today have a responsibility to contribute to maintaining order and the rule of law, at the domestic, regional, and global levels. New Zealand may be geographically distant from most countries, but that doesn't mean we don't share this responsibility as well.

Today I'd like to share how our small nation strives to be a responsible actor in the international community, with a particular focus on our role within the Pacific.

It all starts at home, by having a strong legislative framework in place. This is where Parliament comes in. Around the world, parliaments have a key role in ensuring the wellbeing of citizens and preserving the rule of law.

In New Zealand, the Executive branch of Parliament has the power to enter into or withdraw from international treaties. However, many treaties, both multilateral and bilateral, are presented to the House of Representatives for consideration by select committees, ensuring they are thoroughly scrutinised before being ratified.

A recent example is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which New Zealand ratified in July 2018. As with similar treaties, this was examined by our Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, who received written and oral submissions before reporting back to Parliament. This process gives such significant international treaties the opportunity for scrutiny by a wide cross-section of voices, ensuring the best interests of our citizens are met.

But of course, it's not enough to maintain order and peace on our shores. Regional cooperation, particularly with our neighbours in the Pacific, is essential to sharing knowledge and fostering stability in the region.

Just last month, the IPU and the New Zealand Parliament hosted a security seminar for Pacific region parliaments. Focusing on the UN Security Council resolution 1540 and tackling the global spread of illicit weapons, this was a valuable opportunity for the New Zealand Parliament to help build capacity in the Pacific and share our knowledge and experience of contributing to global security.

And a year ago, I was part of a New Zealand delegation to Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, led by our Speaker, the Rt Hon Trevor Mallard. Meeting a broad cross-section of society, I was particularly proud of the discussions we had with women leaders in both these nations about the contributions women can make in Parliament. It's so essential that we help foster equal representation in parliaments, which can help contribute a diversity of voices to the quest for regional peace.

I'd like to close my address by reflecting on what I believe to be one of the biggest hurdles to maintaining legal order and stability at home and across the world. Although we've seen improvements, maintaining public trust in Parliament and its related institutions is a challenge in New Zealand, as I am sure it is in many other states.

My call for my colleagues here today is to consider how we build, and keep, our people's trust and confidence in parliaments to achieve the objectives we're discussing at this Assembly. The greatest threat to international democracy and law and order is the loss of faith in our democratic processes. We all have a duty to give our citizens a reason to hold onto this faith.

Thank you.