

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

***Remarks from Mr. Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD, Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann
(Speaker of the Irish House of Representatives)***

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It is disappointing for us all that we are unable to meet in person in Vienna this month to discuss the crucial issue of delivering peace and sustainable development for all our citizens. I welcome an opportunity to address a few written words to the virtual conference and thank the IPU and the Austrian Parliament for allowing us all make the best of these dark and troubling times by engaging remotely from our own national assemblies.

This cruel virus and the deep devastation wrought on us serves to highlight what I made clear in my video message to this IPU conference. We are stronger when we work together. Covid-19 respects no national boundaries or state borders; it seeps through the porous, man-made barriers created on the pages of an atlas.

Ireland and her European Union partners and friends have recently concluded discussions on ambitious recovery mechanisms, and EU members continue to work closely together to find a vaccine for Coronavirus.

Addressing the specific theme of these remarks, Ireland was recently elected to serve an upcoming two-year term on the Security Council of the United Nations. We are deeply grateful to our many international friends who supported us in this bid, and Ireland will seek to use its seat on the Council to promote a more just, equitable, and peaceful global community. We have long shown our engagement and respect for the United Nations, and it is a source of pride to us that our Defence Force personnel have done so much practical and important work over many decades in bringing peace and stability to so many troubled parts of our global community.

Regarding the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Ireland played a unique and central role in the process to agree these ambitious targets. In 2014, Ireland's United Nations Ambassador was appointed to co-chair, with Kenya, the final intergovernmental negotiations. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals.

Moving from the international to the national, Ireland's parliament, the Houses of the Oireachtas, continues to support and nurture closer, more effective multilateralism. Since taking office in 2016, I have been honoured to visit many countries and parliaments, and I have welcomed many Heads of State, parliamentary speakers, ministers, committees, and other delegations to Leinster House, home of our assembly. Personal engagement between parliamentarians of different nations is key. We can learn from each other, support each other, conscious of what we share as well as areas of difference and contention. To agree to disagree, agreeably, is a sign of confident and strong parliamentarianism. In the age of Covid-19, we have shown that we can communicate effectively and efficiently without meeting in person. This virtual conference is a case in point.

In short, we face a global health and economic challenge of unprecedented scale. Quite rightly, all our energies and attention are currently given to ridding our lands of the scourge of Covid-19. When these dark days have left us, which I sincerely hope will be soon, we will be able to show future generations that a collective, multilateral approach to this pandemic was the sensible, practical and morally correct course of action. When brighter days are with us, I hope we can harness that effective, result-driven multilateralism to address the equally pressing issues of delivering peace and sustainable development. As representatives and voices of our communities, we parliamentarians have the knowledge, the information and the shared ambition to seek to deliver these goals. Future generations expect nothing less from us.