

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
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General Debate on the theme

"Parliaments as platforms to enhance education for peace, security and the rule of law"

by H.E. Mr. Demetris Syllouris,
President of the House of Representatives (Cyprus)

Dear Madam President,

Dear Colleagues,

Although education is a fundamental right for every citizen irrespective of country, religion, ethnicity or culture, many remain deprived of this right. Everyone knows that education is necessary for the progress of all societies. Everyone also knows that education is an investment, one of the most valuable we can make; an investment in peace, security and economic prosperity. Education is a key factor in reducing poverty, improving health, increasing gender equality, boosting economic growth, ensuring a more sustainable planet and therefore fostering peace, security and the rule of law. It is actually a powerful response to many of the world's most pressing challenges.

Delivering quality education to all and supporting this cause in every possible way must be accepted as our collective fundamental duty. If education is given to every child, there is more chance for that child to make better decisions and enjoy a better quality of life. My recent initiative to introduce of the Arabic language in Cyprus' educational system aims, among other things, to provide young refugees arriving in Cyprus from neighbouring countries with the inalienable right to education and the best possible opportunities to develop their cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing. It is also step in the direction of enhancing the understanding and appreciation of other peoples' culture and civilization.

Education builds the foundations for good citizenship, self-respect and respect for others, democratic values and tolerance of different opinions. With our young generations becoming more and more indifferent to violence, the role of schools and their curriculum assume great significance. As legislators, we have a duty to give schools the power to shape the views and abilities of young people towards peaceful human relations. By teaching young children the values of respect, acceptance and tolerance and by equipping them with the necessary skills to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, they are provided with the necessary tools to foster these peaceful relations.

It is true that human history demonstrates that education is not a guarantee against hatred or war. It is also true that education broadens people's horizons and can eliminate prejudice and stereotypes. And while a common method that countries use to deal with war and conflict remains military action, a more preventive approach is clearly preferable – that is the obligation of every state to provide basic education to its citizens, thus promoting a culture of peace and non-violence. Governments must shift their priorities from accumulating political and military power towards building a stronger educational infrastructure for peace. We, parliamentarians, must strive to build a culture which includes values, beliefs and attitudes that reject violence; a culture that is able to prevent war and conflict also by addressing their root causes, with a view to solving problems through dialogue and negotiation. Education can therefore facilitate the transition to a world without conflicts, aggression and military occupations. Without threats against sovereign states and with full respect of international law.

Every individual is capable of making a contribution towards a more peaceful future. It is our job to make sure that our citizens are fully aware that they can be involved and contribute in what is going

on in the world. Peace education, including respect of international law raises awareness of the roots and causes of conflict and provides people with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to conflict. We are called to legislate so that our schools include in their work, programs that rebuild the community and strengthen relations between communities. Programs that raise standards and stimulate the growth of a truly universal culture of peace. I know that this process will be a long one and it might take years to be able to witness a peaceful and secure world, but at least generations to come will have the chance to experience the benefits.

It must therefore become our common vision, as we are the voice of our citizens, to educate our people to live together in peace and harmony. I cannot imagine a better world without a global commitment to provide better education for everyone. I urge all of you to support this cause for a peaceful and sustainable tomorrow.

Thank you!