

138th MEETING OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Dear Mr President

Dear colleagues

I would like to start by welcoming everyone present to this one hundred and thirty-eighth Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

I believe in the importance of these meetings, insofar as they invite us to take the knowledge we share at these meetings to our respective countries.

As a Portuguese, I feel that Portugal has done justice to its history, in the way it has dealt with the recent migratory challenges.

Historically, we are an emigration country and there is almost no place in the world where Portuguese is not spoken.

In the last decades, Portugal has been a destination for many foreigners, who wanted to come and live in this country or even to take refuge here – the good reception, hospitality, social integration, access to health care, education and work – were and are a reality in Portugal.

In an increasingly globalised world, where the movement of people and goods is also on the upswing, we have witnessed a growing phenomenon of demographic migration, a factor that has certainly served to enrich peoples and integrate individuals, but that also raises problems and challenges that cannot be ignored, or even neglected.

We know and it has been proven that natural migration promotes economic growth and development, helping with demographic renewal and to bring cultures closer together.

These migrations bring with them ideas, products, innovation, ambition and entrepreneurship.

And here I recall the principle to which the New York Declaration binds us, to reinforce the positive contributions made by migrants to economic and social development in the host countries.

In fact, when I am talking about migration today, I am considering a reality that goes well beyond the phenomenon of the classical migration of people.

But, as in everything in life, migrations do not only have a positive face.

There is also the negative side, that of suffering, when migrations are linked to acts of war, armed conflict, oppression or conquest, terrorism, arms trafficking, human trafficking, failed states, dictatorships and the promotion of poverty.

These acts are supported and financed by the commercialisation of drugs, which will have to be given priority attention on the issues to be addressed.

We cannot forget, too, two very important causes of migration, which are food insecurity and climate change, which should also be given a special approach by this meeting.

The last few years have brought the migration of new population groups, often fleeing from situations of suffering and misery, if not from political, religious or ethnic persecution, which can be welcomed and protected.

Mr President,

Dear Colleagues

To better understand the reality of migration, let us look at the figures released by OECD Director of the Cooperation and Development Department, Moreira da Silva, as they are very enlightening:

Today, we are facing the biggest crisis of migrations and refugees since the 2nd World War, reaching 65 million people, of which 21 million are refugees in other countries and the rest forced to migrate to other regions of their own country.

In the last 40 years, only one in 40 refugee crises has been resolved in less than three years.

Syrian refugees represent only 25% of the total refugees. The remainder are associated with other conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

The myth that the European Union is the main destination of refugees, particularly from Syria, is false! As more than 86% of refugees move to developing countries along their border.

In other words, it is the poorest countries that suffer the greatest impacts of forced migration, as is the example of Uganda that received more refugees from South Sudan than all the Syrian refugees who cross the Mediterranean in the direction of Europe.

Today I believe we will be able to create better responses – better laws – and standardise responses to address the causes of forced migration by designing more effective hosting solutions.

For this is a test of our citizenship.

Dear Colleagues

That is exactly where I start.

As Members of our countries, I believe that our role is not only focused on the creation of legislation with a view to the long term.

We can – and must – act beyond the resolution of causes, even working with humanitarian structures.

We can – and must – create legislation to promote the well-being of refugees and the beginning of a better life than those in their countries of origin.

We can – and must – act with the resources immediately available to honour and ensure that human rights are not violated in the case of people in situations of vulnerability, such as refugees.

Fellow parliamentarians,

We have the mission of creating immediate conditions to make available to those who seek us the resources that exist and that can guarantee them a dignified life.

We must therefore act immediately to prevent citizens, who have already been forced to seek asylum, from entering into vulnerable situations, by any means whatsoever.

I am also aware that these answers of which I am speaking cannot be implemented in all refugee host countries.

We cannot forget, and I would like to remind you, that a large number of refugees look to neighbouring countries and that few are those who risk their lives on a boat bound for Europe.

These neighbouring countries may, in fact, have similar conditions of underdevelopment, conditions of poverty, which are aggravated by the impact of migration.

Dear friends,

I understand this reality as an increased responsibility for the more developed countries of all continents.

We must act.

We must act, not only because we can be the destination of many migrants, paying in the future the costs of hosting; or because we will be called upon to help them through humanitarian aid.

We must act, because it is our responsibility to come to their aid.

And I will end as I started, by emphasizing the importance of devising measures today that will have an effect on the cause of the problems.

Aware that we live in a world that belongs to all and that borders are of little importance when escaping war, hunger or lack of water;

Aware that this is a global problem, which requires wide and deep cooperation, because it is not just the humanity of our behaviour and the tolerance of our laws that are in question.

Peace, development and the human person are also in question.

José de Matos Rosa

Geneva, March 2018