



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU President's Statement

Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the UN Alliance of Civilizations

Mr. Saber Chowdhury

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President,

Today's meeting on xenophobia is an appropriate conclusion to this week's discussion on migration here at the United Nations. Xenophobia, and its attendant racism, is often a response to large migratory movements. With the current spike in migrants, the world is seeing a rise in hate crimes and discrimination against foreigners.

Xenophobia is an irrational, mostly subconscious *fear* that can and must be conquered.

Too often, people who live in homogenous societies are susceptible to seeing those who are different from themselves as a potential threat to their national identity, or to their livelihoods. But as history shows, cohabitation between different races, ethnicities, cultures and religions though difficult at first can become a natural fact of life. Culture is never static. In time, and with proper management, people recognize diversity in their midst for what it is: an *advantage* to themselves and their communities, and even a point of national pride.

Diversity is strength, and we should embrace it wholeheartedly.

Parliamentarians have a key role in facilitating this transition in public perception and in actual reality. As legislators and opinion makers, we have a *responsibility* to combat xenophobia and racism with all our tools. This year's report by the Special Rapporteur notes, sadly, that some in our ranks have failed this responsibility, scapegoating foreigners to score political points or to cover up for their own shortcomings as policy-makers. Clearly, we need to do more work in our community to get us all on the same page.

IPU will continue to foster policies that address the root causes of xenophobia and further provide an environment where expressions of xenophobia are consistently condemned and rejected. We need to address the disease as well as the symptoms. Taking the cue from the international human rights framework as well as landmark agreements such as the 2001 Durban Declaration, IPU has organized discussions on migration and xenophobia, providing positive guidance to parliamentarians around the world.

The world's 45,000 MPs in the IPU community are a microcosm of all ethnicities, races and religious beliefs. IPU assemblies, in which up to 1000 MPs participate, are inherently exercises in cross-cultural understanding.

Young MPs constitute a new key constituency that IPU brings together. Young people are the forefront of the change we want in development, democracy and human rights. Our Forum of Young Parliamentarians is promoting engagement in all of these issues through its regular meetings and follow up initiatives.

Last year's 133rd IPU Assembly on *The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*, and the IPU's 2012 Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*, provided two major opportunities for political dialogue on xenophobia. These declarations called on parliaments to prevent, combat and eliminate discrimination, repeal any existing discriminatory laws, enact legislation to counter the dissemination, in the media and via the internet, of hate messages, and ensure legal protection and remedies for individuals experiencing discrimination.

A 2008 resolution goes even further. It called on parliaments to pass laws prohibiting political parties and public or private organizations that promote racism, sexism and xenophobia or related intolerance, to enact legislation protecting the victims of violence and abuse related to racism and xenophobia, and to develop educational programmes to strengthen solidarity, cultural diversity and tolerance toward people from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

Last year, IPU published a Handbook for Parliamentarians on *Migration, human rights and governance* together with ILO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Drawing on international law and national best practices, this handbook presents in very accessible terms the concrete actions MPs can take to help design and implement effective migration policies as well as other measures to combat discrimination and xenophobia.

Going forward, and on the basis of this year's GA resolution on *interaction between the UN, parliaments and the IPU*, which encourages closer cooperation to advance the vision of the Alliance, I hope we will be able to capitalize on these initiatives and measure the results on the ground.

After all, there is only one planet and one humanity.

Thank you.