



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# 135<sup>th</sup> IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

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## Concept note

### **General Debate on *Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: Parliaments as early responders***

No country is immune to human rights violations. Across the world, marginalization, political exclusion, undue restrictions to fundamental freedoms such as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, religious intolerance and poverty are prevalent.

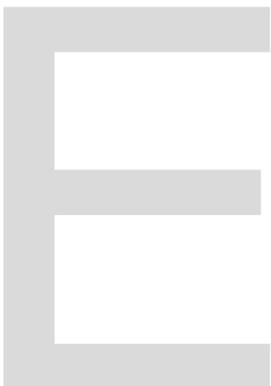
States continue to fall short of fully implementing the civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights to which they have subscribed through their constitutions and by signing up to international treaties.

Failure to address human rights challenges not only runs counter to national and international obligations, but if abuses become more widespread and serious, also creates a fertile breeding ground for violent conflict. It is clear that a pervasive lack of respect for human dignity and an airtight lid on the free flow of information and ideas - indispensable for democracy to flourish - are bound to increase the appeal of those bent on advocating the use of violence to achieve their own objectives. These situations are often compounded by poor governance, resulting in injustice, whether real or perceived.

Parliaments are the guardians of human rights by their very nature as they work for the well-being of the people that they represent. Parliamentarians are also the "eyes and ears" of ordinary citizens and are familiar with their concerns. They are well-placed to articulate those concerns in parliament and to place them in the context of the greater good for the country as a whole. Parliaments should therefore be at the forefront in raising the alarm and taking action when very serious human rights challenges arise.

The General Debate is designed to look at specific ways in which parliaments can best fulfil their obligation to protect the population and their human rights by responding to the following questions:

- What are good examples of parliamentary mechanisms and processes to:  
(i) promote respect for human rights; (ii) monitor human rights developments; and  
(iii) respond to serious and evolving patterns of human rights violations and their underlying causes?
- How to ensure that parliaments are part of the solution, not the problem, in responding to increased patterns of human rights violations? What role does good governance play in preventing or halting violent conflict?
- How to counter the tendency to give respect for human rights even lower priority by the time violent conflict erupts, although the opposite would do much to de-escalate the situation?



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- How can parliaments better draw on women's involvement and leadership in resolving human rights challenges and potential violent conflict? What is the role of civil society and marginalized groups?
- How can regional and international parliamentary diplomacy signal and act on potentially violent human rights situations, bearing in mind the global political commitment - *Responsibility to Protect (R2P)* - to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity?
- What mechanisms can the IPU set up to help address human rights situations likely to lead to violent conflict?
- How to ensure greater parliamentary engagement with and integration into early warning and early response efforts by the United Nations and regional organizations, bearing in mind the UN Secretary General's Human Rights Up Front Initiative?