

## 135. IPU ASSEMBLY

Geneva, 24-27 October 2016

### General debate

"Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: parliaments as early responders"

Honourable President Chowdhury,

Esteemed Secretary General Chungong,

Fellow MPs,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my greatest pleasure to take this opportunity and address you on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia given the importance of the topic we are discussing today, and high competence of present participants who are representatives of citizens in whose interest we are primarily addressing this issue. Our organisation, throughout its year-long persistent commitment to fundamental values we are all devoted to, including peace, security, representative democracy, parliamentarism, peaceful cooperation between nations, sustainable development and gender equality, has confirmed its importance as a unique global parliamentary forum for dialogue and cooperation between nations and parliaments.

The country I come from, the Republic of Serbia, was one of the first countries in the world to join the Interparliamentary Union and for the past 125 years it has cooperated and supported the IPU in promoting universal human rights, gender equality and children's rights. Today, when in Serbia we are marking 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our membership in the Interparliamentary Union, we reaffirm our commitment to high

standards of representative democracy, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality which have been implemented in Serbia, while we strive to preserve peace, security and peaceful coexistence with our neighbours in the Balkans and in Europe.

Dear colleagues, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to underline the importance of the role parliaments play in defending human rights. Respect for and observance of human rights is one of the basic principles and *sine qua non* of the modern world. Human rights are based on human dignity and are universal and essential.

As the Speaker of Parliament, and also as a free thinking political person, and a citizen with all my rights and obligations, I believe that parliaments are central place for human rights protection in a democratic state. Parliaments are human rights protectors by their very nature, as they work for the good of the people they represent. Parliaments are also "eyes and ears" of our societies and they can express concerns of citizens they represent.

Dear Colleagues,

One of parliament's main roles is passing laws which provide for protection of human rights. Also, by ratifying international legal mechanisms, parliaments and states provide additional guarantees for the protection of citizens' rights. European states also have the European Court of Human Rights, to which citizens can turn to if they think their rights have been denied. The Parliament of Serbia is developing mechanisms of oversight regarding the implementation of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights, in our country. I believe that the role of parliamentary oversight is very important. In Serbia we are doing our utmost to bring parliament closer to the people,

so that they can approach their Members of Parliament if they require assistance in defending their rights.

Human and minority rights and freedoms, along with the rule of law and social justice, principles of civil democracy, and shared European principles - are fundamental values the Republic of Serbia is based on. Well-being of our people is in the focus of all our efforts. The state is at the service of all our citizens: minority and majority, women and men, children and adults, regardless of their ethnic, religious or sexual background. In Serbia we argue that differences are our richness!

What I would particularly like to underline is that the Republic of Serbia is not safeguarding human rights of its nationals only, but others as well. This was clearly demonstrated during the migration crisis. We provided shelter to hundreds of thousands of migrants and showed humanity and solidarity, in respect of the international law and humanitarian standards.

Dear Colleagues,

In a modern world common challenges require common solutions. In this, we are together and therefore we should continue building institutions that guarantee respect of human rights, both nationally and internationally. Given the important role parliaments play in democratic societies, they need to be at the front in warning and taking action when human rights are seriously challenged. Failure to do so contradicts national and international obligations, and can incite violent conflicts if abuses become more serious and widespread.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Parliaments always reflect most important social developments, even conflicts. We have to confront violations and abuses of human rights and freedoms and thus prevent escalation of conflicts caused by human rights abuses.

Therefore I believe that our parliaments have to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. In addressing human rights challenges, good governance plays very important role, as well as women's leadership and participation of civil society organisations and marginalised groups.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of international and national legal procedures and the central role parliaments play, in protecting and promoting human rights in democratic societies. Also, it is very important that parliaments are open for debates and for public. They must allow every single voice to be heard, to which the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia is fully committed to.

Thank you for your attention.