

Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: Parliaments as early responders

Mr President!

Secretary General!

Dear Colleagues!

Latvia, situated in the North-Eastern part of Europe, has joined international treaties on human rights after regaining independence in nineteen ninety-one. For more than twelve years being a Member State of the European Union, Latvia attaches great importance to the issues related to human rights.

Besides that Latvia is proud to make its international contribution, currently being a Member of United Nations Human Rights Council. Latvia's priorities in the Council include gender equality, freedom of speech and civic society participation.

In my address I will mostly tackle internal dimension of Parliamentary role. At the same time, it is crucial to remember that Parliaments can also express attitude and appeal to other countries in the cases of human rights violations worldwide.

I would like to underline, that in order to avoid conflicts that may eventually develop due to human rights violations, it is essential to strengthen solid prevention mechanisms.

In my view Parliamentary role in conflict prevention is important in several aspects. All of them are closely linked to the principles of participatory democracy.

Let me introduce Latvia's approach. First of all, Parliamentarians are in close contact with their constituency, having regular meetings with people across the country. That gives better understanding about the acute problems that eventually may evolve into conflicts if not properly tackled.

Secondly, various Parliamentary Committees are platforms that give opportunity for comprehensive interaction and coordination among various stakeholders belonging to the legislative and executive branches and NGOs. Close cooperation with civic society organizations has facilitated better understanding of the existing and potential problems.

And thirdly, the Parliament is responsible for a comprehensive legislative framework covering all areas of human rights protection, both by adopting national laws and by ratifying international conventions and treaties. The importance of broad and inclusive discussions prior to the adoption of legally binding documents are of utmost importance.

Dear Colleagues!

Let me give you a few examples of well-established mechanisms for interaction with the society which have proved to be efficient in Latvia.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, all persons have the right to file submissions to the Parliament. They are significant source of information which is used by Committees and individual Parliamentarians in their daily work.

Another mechanism is “Youth Parliament” which involves young and active part of the society. This parliamentary project gives opportunity to youngsters to voice and defend their ideas, while gaining better insight into Parliamentary work. One hundred of them, reflecting the total number of Latvia’s Parliamentarians, are elected and once a year meet in the Parliament in order to address the society from the rostrum of the Parliament.

Also let me mention an online platform “My voice” that has been enabled by the Parliament. It allows to promote to the Parliament any initiative that complies with certain criteria and that may be transformed into a draft law provided ten thousand registered signatures have been collected. Within five years “My voice” has received huge support from the local society and twenty-two initiatives have received the necessary number of signatures. Six of them have been approved by the Parliament and seven other are being reviewed in the Parliament.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize that openness, interactivity with society and involvement of civic society should be a priority of every Parliament. Ideally, we as Parliamentarians are sensors that can transform and deliver society’s concerns into relevant legislative acts that are part and parcel of sustainable solutions.

Thank you for your attention!