

**Wolesi Jirga
National assembly of Afghanistan**

Address by Hon. Fawzia Koofi, Chairman of Women Affairs

135th IPU Assembly

**General Debate on the theme:
*Human Rights Abuses as precursors of conflict:
Parliaments as early responders***

22-27 October, 2016

Honourable President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,
Honourable Secretary General, Honourable Members of Parliament,
Honourable Director-General of UNOG,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be here and have a chance to speak at the IPU. I see today as a remarkable day in my life for two reasons. Firstly as an Afghan woman, to stand in front of such distinguished people is extraordinary. Imagine that only 15 years ago, it would have been a dream for a woman from Afghanistan to come out of her home without fear of being beaten up by the Taliban, let alone to speak at such a highly respected and credible body as the IPU. So thanks to our partners for making this possible for Afghan women. Secondly, it is extremely important for me to talk about human and women's rights. The two topics are intertwined and challenging to work on successfully.

As one of the primary institutions of the State, parliaments share a responsibility to protect and realize the rule of law and human rights and to implement the State's obligations in that respect, alongside the executive and the judiciary.

Some think that parliamentarians could be part of the problem. I believe MPs are a central part of the solution and represent people from all walks of life. Sometimes, in the parliament where I sit, there are men who used to fight each other using weapons. Now they use green and red cards. Sometimes, they even use the same colour.

I believe the world we live in today suffers from all kinds of extreme violence.

In the context of Afghanistan, my country, the challenges are magnified by insecurity, which is caused by armed conflict on a daily basis. Human beings, especially women, bear the brunt of this. Women and children are vulnerable during armed conflict. Women are not the ones initiating armed conflict, but they suffer its consequences, as do their children, who are dragged into crises unwittingly.

Today, Afghanistan has one of the largest number of Internally Displaced Persons. They constitute almost 5 per cent of the Afghan population. In the majority of cases, this is a direct result of armed conflict. Just earlier this month, 40,000 people had to flee the city of Kunduz in North Eastern Afghanistan, where the Taliban were waging their guerrilla war from people's private homes and using civilians as human shields. Families had to leave their homes and belongings for fear of being crushed by armed hostilities. Women were most vulnerable, and unfortunately on the front line.

In the past two years, up to 300,000 Afghans have immigrated to Europe. This is primarily caused by a negative spiral set off by insecurity and terrorism in our country. Insecurity shrinks economic opportunities and negatively affects the livelihood of citizens. Governments fall short in their duty to provide assistance to people in this context. Conflict dislocates the fabric of life. Schools close, the price of necessities skyrockets, hospitals are stretched and the justice system becomes corrupt. People decide to leave their homes and emigrate. They are willing to brave the unknown.

We understand that Europe cannot take more migrants. We understand that most newcomers will not qualify for asylum in this land. But for those who have reached the shores of Europe, their return has to be managed in a spirit of respect for their human rights and dignity, and in line with international conventions. Sending people back in the midst of war and insecurity is not the ideal answer.

In my country, there is no solution except to bring peace as the guarantee of a better life for all. But peace will not be sustainable if the process of peacemaking is opaque. Peace negotiations ought to be transparent and inclusive. Women should be given their place at the table. Women's voices are needed so that they are not short-changed by the process.

We understand that each country has its own way of involving parliament in the process of ensuring that human rights are respected. The IPU certainly respects its Members' sovereignty and their right to decide on the modalities for compliance with their human rights obligations and on how to fulfil their role as parliaments. In this way, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has effectively ensured that MPs are heard when their rights are violated. In the meantime, we believe nothing prevents us from more systematically taking account of the role of parliaments in ensuring a world free of human rights violations.

Thank you,