

**Speech by Ms. Helmen Kütt**  
Chairperson of the Estonian Delegation to IPU  
at the 135<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly  
**Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: Parliaments as early  
responders**  
Geneva, Switzerland / October 26, 2016

Dear fellow Parliamentarians,  
Ladies and gentlemen!

The IPU general debate on human rights abuses as precursors of conflict, and its relationship to the parliamentary response, takes place at a very timely moment. This is the duty of all our countries to ensure protection of human rights, and there is much work to be done. Our daily newsfeed is filled with information on human rights abuses. Often the most vulnerable, including children, women, elderly and indigenous peoples, are hit the most severely.

Sadly, in many cases it happens by the actions or negligence of their own governments, such as the military bombing in Syria, enforced disappearance and forced displacement of people in Afghanistan, South Sudan, and elsewhere. Even in the heart of Europe – in the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea – we witness systematic and violent oppression of human rights, oppression of a certain minority group – the Crimean Tatars, as well as of the human rights’ defenders.

This is where we, the representatives of our nations, must step up and be loud and clear in our messages, and in our deeds every single day. While parliaments must be the early responders whenever human rights are being violated, the MPs are by no means the only actors. We need to work in partnership with civil society organizations and international advocacy groups to monitor and address human rights abuses.

All governments and other actors violating human rights shall know that they will be held responsible for their conduct.

The protection and promotion of human rights is the key to democracy and development, and for this reason it is also among the main goals of the Inter-Parliamentary Union since its establishment. This organization would not exist without our common understanding of the importance of upholding values such as the right to life and dignity, and the freedom of expression. This is the duty of our parliaments to adopt laws and regulations which will take into account human rights.

During this plenary, the IPU's Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights is adopting a resolution on the freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference. I truly believe that the equal involvement of women at all levels and in all areas is a key to a better, fairer, and less violent world.

When asked, what can be done to better ensure women's rights as a part of human rights, many suggest that women need to do more. Madeline Albright has famously said: "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women." No one knows – maybe it's true – but it is a fact that women already have done a lot and have been very vocal in advocating for women's issues, both within parliaments and outside of them.

However, this is not sufficient. Currently, 79% of all members of parliaments around the world are men, and it is impossible to increase women's involvement and leadership without the full support of men and societies as a whole. Partnership and collaboration are the key words here.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to add another dimension to our current discussion on human rights and how its abuses can lead to violence. While violent conflicts are something physical and very easy to see, their roots can be extremely difficult to track. With so much of our daily communication taking place in the cyber domain, it is important to acknowledge that human rights have to be protected offline as well as online.

The link between discussions or activities in the online-world and physical gatherings or conflicts can be very direct. Internet can help organize people both for very good causes and for violence and extremism. The use of cyber domain for purposes to instigate violence and extremism needs to be closely monitored, but attempts by states and governments to close down the flows of information and block access to legitimate online content cannot be tolerated.

We need to be cautious and smart, but protecting and promoting human rights and freedoms online is increasingly important.

Dear friends,

The protection of human rights is an endeavour that covers a host of different areas from women's human rights to the Internet, and takes place at the local, national, and international level at the same time. While the need to protect human rights is timeless, being truly successful in this is possible only when we understand the new contexts in which human rights are found.

As members of parliaments, let's continue fighting against escalation of conflicts and work towards a future in which respecting human rights will be beyond question for all nations.

Thank you for your attention.