

General Debate on
Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all.

**Address by Mr. Gundars DAUDZE,
Vice – Speaker of the SAEIMA (Parliament of LATVIA),
Head of the Latvian National Group,**

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1-5 April 2017

Mr. President,

Secretary General,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to take part at the Inter-Parliamentary Union General Assembly once again. I would like to thank the organizers for the wonderful job they have done in organizing this event.

Addressing inequalities is a topic that is very timely even if we, as societies, have witnessed huge improvements in this respect over the past decades.

In my address I will touch the issue of inequalities in three aspects. First, I will speak about gender equality, second, I will tackle issues related to youth participation, and third, I will speak about the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups of society like people with disabilities and the poor.

Gender equality has become an issue that has been addressed more and more often in modern societies. There are various ways how to contribute to gender equality efficiently. Latvia is not in favour of quota system in order to promote women representation in public institutions.

Instead, we strive for creating environment that provides all preconditions for women to make their own choices in life, including active participation in politics or business.

I would like to share with you some statistics in this regard. Since Latvia regained independence in 1991, 4 out of 9 Speakers of Parliament have been women, including the current Speaker. Latvian women are active in business as well. For instance, Latvia ranks number 7 within the EU Member States in terms of female share in leading positions in publicly listed companies.

A great way to encourage even more women to participate in politics, is involvement in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many women politicians in Latvia have started as NGO activists and have entered into politics at a later stage.

We as parliamentarians are responsible for timely and inclusive legislative framework. Issues related to gender equality are regularly discussed at Parliamentary Committees in Latvia where NGOs take part as well. The policies formulated by the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia as a rule reflect the inclusive approach and follow the principle of gender equality.

Latvia is actively engaging with gender equality issues also at the EU and international level. Latvia is currently elected in the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, as well as in the Board of European Institute for Gender Equality. Besides, Latvia takes part in various formats at the Council of Europe and European Commission which are dealing with gender equality issues.

Youth participation, including involvement in politics, is also important. Latvia can be proud that 23 parliamentarians out of 100 are 45 years old or younger. It means that almost one quarter of our Parliament is formed by young generation. Why is it so important? In my opinion it means that young people are ready to take responsibility to change life in their country for better.

The Parliament of Latvia has invested in youth involvement by establishing Youth Parliament platform. It gives opportunity to young people to express ideas, as well as to collect votes of support. 100 of them, reflecting the total number of Latvia's Parliamentarians, are elected and once a year meet in the Parliament in order to voice and defend their ideas from the rostrum of the Parliament.

People with disabilities traditionally are among the **most vulnerable groups** of our societies. These groups require our special attention. As mentioned in the Concept note

of today's debate, one of the main targets to reach the Sustainable Development Goal for reducing inequalities, is necessity to adopt social protection policies. In Latvia legislative framework provides guarantees for social payments and access to social services and infrastructure.

However, inclusiveness and dignity means also necessity to create social enterprises where people with disabilities can receive adequate job opportunities. Draft law on social enterprise activity has passed the first reading in the Parliament of Latvia in late 2016. The draft is open for amendments and is likely to come into force early next year. This work is done in close cooperation with NGOs that are active in tackling this issue.

Another vulnerable group is the poor population with insufficient income. Dignity and well-being of people can be reinforced by providing conditions for better income. Tax reform that is currently being carried out in Latvia, is aimed at reducing income inequality by lowering individual income tax and raising enterprise profit tax. In long run that will also reduce grey economy and as a result will improve social guarantees for the socially less protected citizens.

Distinguished colleagues,

in conclusion, let me stress that inclusiveness is a key. **What is more**, we have follow the principle of equality when we discuss and adopt new legislative acts.

I wish fruitful discussions to all of us!

Thank you!