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General debate on redressing inequalities:
Delivering on dignity and well-being for all

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Mr President.

Esteemed colleagues.

Development should not take place “at all costs ... not at the cost of environment or the marginalization of the poor and other vulnerable groups.”

These words were spoken by Amina Mohammed,
the UN Deputy Secretary-General,
in New York on the 20th of March,
the International Day of Happiness.

And these words sum up wonderfully the belief which all of us in this room share.

The obligation that we have as parliamentarians,

our obligation to society in our countries,
but also to global society.

For it is no longer possible in the 21st
century to conceive our societies without
each other,

- without our inter-connectedness,
- our mutual dependency,
- but above all our partnership.

Unfortunately, though, this self-evident
truth no longer seems to be quite so self-
evident to many in this world.

Indeed, the danger of a faint-hearted
retreat behind a supposed protection zone
of isolationism,

the danger of a re-nationalisation of
thought,

a re-interpretation of what are in part
undoubtedly justifiable fears,
such as terror and violence,
into a justification for exclusion and
division –
this danger is today greater than ever.

Still, our common goal is and remains
development,
the shared pursuit of an equally happy life
as a global society.

And we ARE united in our aims.
We DO share a common foundation.

In a world with 67 million refugees
worldwide,
our point of reference is the “Geneva
Convention”.

In a world where torture is on the march again,
it is the “Convention against Torture and Other Cruel” we believe in.

In a world where ancient sites and statues are dynamited out of a pure lust for destruction,
it is the “Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property” we look up to.

In a world where the worst crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes continue to be bitter reality,

- despite the Holocaust,
- despite Srebrenica,
- despite Rwanda,

it is the “Rome Statute” we adhere to.

And in a world of climate change and escalating injustice,

it is the “Sustainable Development Goals” and the “Paris Agreement” we should rally behind.

All of these noble treaties,
taken together and individually,
are a priceless achievement of civilisation,
the foundation for peace, justice and development,
something that makes us rich.

They are the promise that another world is possible.

For what is today’s reality?

Today, eight individuals own as much as the poorer half of the world's population.

Today, the number of major humanitarian crises is growing again,
from Nigeria to Chad,
from South Sudan to Somalia,
from Yemen to Syria and Ukraine.

Today, new walls are being built in the USA, in Israel, in Hungary.

I, as a German, can tell you what walls do.

I can tell you how freeing it feels,
when walls finally fall.

And I hope that soon,

we will see many other walls disappear,
because what we need is bridges.

As members of the IPU, we are here in
Bangladesh to discuss:

What does sustainable development
actually mean?

Especially: What can we do at home to
achieve it?

After all, the crises have long turned
global,
and BECAUSE they affect us and others
at the same time,

- no walls,
- no fences,
- no Fortress Europe

will help solve them.

Rather, we must question the structures of our political system,
the way we do business,
the way we consume and produce.

This is what is truly radical about the SDGs.

They recognise how inappropriate it has become to divide the world

- into East and West,
- into North and South,
- into industrialised and developing,
- into us and them.

Global sustainable development is a task we share,
a task we must tackle together.

In this sense,
Germany, too, is a developing country.

And believe me: this statement is
something many of my colleagues in
Germany do not like to hear at all.

But it is true.

Germany, too, has to understand that,
of course,
we must accept our share of responsibility
for the state of the world,
for poverty and hunger,
for global inequality.

We have to understand that,

to change things,
it needs more,
such as a fundamental reform of our OWN
agricultural policy,
and a much fairer global trade system.

As long as we as Europeans, however,
continue to sell arms and weapons to war-
mongering countries,
as long as we export our subsidised milk
powder and cuts of chicken to developing
countries,
as long as we continue to fuel climate
change,
armed conflicts will be fought,
local family farmers will be marginalised,
and the sea level will rise.

This is why true sustainable development begins at home.

It is here that we can change things.

It is here that we can change
OURSELVES.

What our One World urgently needs,
therefore,

is a fundamental re-education with respect
to our co-existence and mutual
dependency.

That is where the fight against injustice
and inequalities begins.

Today, not tomorrow.

Thank you very much!