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Concept note

General Debate on Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue

In October 2012, the IPU adopted the Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*. By so doing, Members reaffirmed their conviction "that a world where people with their differences co-exist is possible, one where there is awareness of differential solidarity and where a dialogue of civilizations is encouraged. Such a world, which depends on our mutual understanding and acceptance, would be a source of progress for humanity and would lead to the well-being of our global society."

Members recognized the importance of balancing respect for diversity with social inclusiveness and cohesion as a means of building trust within and among societies and as a sine qua non for progress, prosperity and a high quality of life. They underscored the fact that all individuals must be allowed the full enjoyment of their equal and inalienable rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights and humanitarian law treaties and standards, and that they should not be subject to any discrimination based on culture, race, colour, language, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation or political affiliation. Five years down the line, the principles enshrined in the Quebec City Declaration remain as valid and relevant as ever.

Our world today is an inter-connected one. Societies are diverse and multicultural, and the careful management of this diversity has become key to building peaceful and prosperous nations. New technologies and migration are breaking down old barriers and bringing people together in a multitude of ways. At the same time, however, these developments are also vectors of growing intolerance, xenophobia and extremism. Conflict and persecution have led to unprecedented flows of refugees and displaced persons, which in turn have served as pretexts for rising populism and discriminatory policies. Religious and sectarian divides are generating confrontation and human suffering. Radicalization and violent extremism are rearing their ugly head in virtually all regions of the world.

The question, therefore, is how to manage this diversity and ensure it contributes to the peaceful development of our societies?

Inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue is an essential component of respect for diversity and promotion of sustainable peace. As set forth in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding, are among the best guarantees of international peace and security.

Parliamentarians serve the people and work to protect their rights; they are natural sentinels of peace. They are also key players in preventing and resolving inter-ethnic and inter-faith conflicts. Democratic and representative parliaments reflect the popular will as expressed in the choices of electors, but also the diversity of the population in terms of language, religion, ethnicity or other characteristics. They reflect and channel social debate through parliamentary discussions and decisions. A parliament which is not representative and inclusive of society in all its diversity will inevitably leave groups and communities behind, with potentially dramatic consequences.

As lawmakers and representatives of the people, parliamentarians are also called upon to lead by example. In their everyday work, they can take the pulse of local communities, serve as early warning systems to possible disputes, help build bridges between different communities, and combat hate speech and other dangerous manifestations. They can establish legal frameworks that promote peaceful coexistence and prevent violent extremism, while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. They can work together with local and religious leaders in the struggle against fundamentalist interpretations of the holy books that can inflame tensions and lead to violence. By exercising their budgetary oversight capacity, parliamentarians can also prevent the funding of projects and organizations that promote hatred and intolerance. All of this should be done in a spirit of transparency and inclusiveness, ensuring the participation of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities and other groups in their efforts.

The General Debate at the 137th IPU Assembly will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians from around the world to share their national, regional and international experience and identify ways of better managing cultural pluralism and achieving peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue.

During the debate, delegates may wish to consider the following questions:

- What are good examples of parliamentary action to enhance inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue?
- How can parliamentarians better engage with their constituents to effectively promote reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, while leaving no one behind?
- How can parliamentarians better engage with religious leaders in order to make sure that fundamental human rights are protected and that respect for other faiths is promoted?
- What role can parliaments play to ensure universal access to quality education that promotes civic rights, respect and equality, and tolerance of other cultures and religions?
- How can parliaments ensure that measures taken to counter terrorism and to prevent violent extremism are not based on stereotypes, and are in full compliance with international law?
- How can parliaments combat hate speech in public discourse and on-line platforms?
- How can parliamentary diplomacy and the IPU help to resolve inter-faith and inter-ethnic conflicts?

Reference documents:

- Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world* (2012) - www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/res-quebec.htm.
- Declaration from the General Debate on *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration* (2015) - www.ipu.org/conf-e/133/gen-debate.htm
- Outcome document of the General Debate on *Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: Parliaments as early responders* (2016) - <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/135/item3.pdf>
- Dhaka Communiqué on *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all* (2017) - <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/136/item3.pdf>
- UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) - http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf