

137th IPU Assembly  
St Petersburg, 14 - 18 October 2017

General debate

“Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue”

Honourable Mr President,

Esteemed Secretary General,

Honourable Parliamentarians,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my greatest pleasure to **address** you on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. I would like to extend **special** gratitude to our host, the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, for an **excellent** organisation of the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, **and** for their hospitality.

The topic of our session is very important for **each** state and for **all** the countries together. It is also important for the international community, based on universal values. The **essence** of this unity is in the dialogue.

Honourable parliamentarians,

Promoting a dialogue between religions and ethnic communities is a **condition** for cultural pluralism. At the same time, this dialogue reminds us that different cultures and religions make us richer and stronger.

**Each** religion and ethnic community has its characteristics, and that should be respected. This is possible only through dialogue. We, the representatives of citizens need to promote this dialogue. We also need to enable a wide range, of people and social groups to participate.

Honourable Parliamentarians,

Have a look at your colleagues and friends from other delegations around you. We all come from different cultures and nations, and we might have different religious beliefs and customs. Being different as we are, we represent our peoples and states the best way we can. This does not prevent us from talking freely to each other. We respect and listen to each other. Our **task** is to convey the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance to our societies. This spirit **must** be an example for cooperation among our countries. Cherishing and promoting dialogue, peace

and stability, with respect of differences: **these** are the **key** values of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Honourable Colleagues,

I would like to stress that pluralism is carefully fostered in Serbia. Our country is a home to a great number of peoples of different religions, languages and cultures. In fact, it is among the **richest** countries in Europe in this respect.

The Republic of Serbia promotes this diversity. Based on the Constitution, we create and apply a legal framework to protect rights and freedoms of national minorities and religious communities. Let me remind you that Serbia recognises not only **individual**, but also the **collective** rights of national minorities.

The **key** laws in this field are the following: the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, the Anti-discrimination Law, as well as the laws related to education and information in the languages of national minorities.

I may proudly say that these laws **ensure** the application of the **highest** world standards in the protection of rights

and freedoms. In this way, Serbia offers a **good** example at the regional, European and even at the **global** level.

In Serbia, there are members of largest world confessions, as well as a large number (more than twenty) of national minorities. In democratic elections, these national minorities elect their representatives to **21** national councils. In **this** way, they enjoy their rights to self-government in: culture, education, information and official use of language and script. They use **11** languages, when they exercise their rights in local and state authorities.

Honourable parliamentarians,

The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia reflects pluralism of our society. Besides the representatives of the Serbian people, there **are** members who represent the Hungarian, Bosniak and Albanian national minorities through their political parties. Let me also add, that political parties of national minorities have to reach only the **natural** threshold to enter the Parliament of Serbia.

I must also stress that members of national minorities are not active **only** in national **minority** parties, but very often within **all other** parliamentary parties in Serbia.

In this context, one of the very interesting regions in Serbia is the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (which I personally come from). Vojvodina has tradition of good relations between more than **twenty** ethnic groups, of different faiths and languages, for centuries. Let me give you just one example from this region, based on Constitution and laws of Serbia.

In the Provincial Parliament, there are as many as **six** officially used languages. I am convinced that in the **whole Europe**, more languages are used only in the European Parliament.

Honourable colleagues,

We must recognize that the dialogue within society, but also **between** countries, is very important, because the global challenges like conflicts, terrorism, migration, do **not** recognise national borders. **This** is why we **must** solve these problems together, through trust and solidarity. We also believe that different levels and forms of dialogue may be **crucial** for the fight against extremism and fundamentalism.

The Republic of Serbia is **constantly** working on dialogue, improving stability and trust in the region. In

this work, our parliaments play a very important role, to **initiate** and promote dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me emphasize that as parliamentarians, we must **always** remember that the peace, stability and prosperity are the universal values, and **fundamental** interest of the people we represent.

**This** task is what we must have in mind in our everyday work, when we represent our citizens, adopt laws, and make sure that the laws are implemented.

When we talk to each other, in our own dialogues, we must also remember that freedom of open dialogue is the value that we **must** protect.

Respect for these principles is our **firm** common ground, to face **all** global challenges and win together, for our countries and citizens.

Thank you for your attention.