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.