

**PLACING DEMOCRACY AT THE SERVICE OF PEACE AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, BUILDING THE WORLD THE
PEOPLE WANT**

delivered by the

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at the

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His Excellency Saber Chowdhury, IPU President,

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General,

His Excellency Sam K. Kutesa, President of UN General Assembly,

Honourable Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

I am indeed very honoured to address this distinguished gathering convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union at this summit. Parliaments are essential for attaining a vibrant democracy, maintaining peace and promoting social justice. The parliamentarians of the world are facing a critical opportunity to protect democracy and human rights while tackling climate change through sustainable development. Human progress in science and technology is futile if the perennial conflicts ailing the human race remain unsolved. Recalling the vision put forward in the Hanoi declaration adopted by the 132nd IPU Parliamentary Assembly a few months ago, parliamentarians need to work to turn words into action, and build the world people really want.

The citizens of the world have acknowledged the reality of climate change and global warming, despite the best efforts of a minority of sceptics and climate change deniers. Echoing the Fifth Assessment Report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change this year, the human carbon footprint is clear and unequivocal. Human progress has augmented global warming and we must act now if we want to curb the effects of climate change. Governments are continuously implementing measures to combat this phenomenon. In the European Union alone, Member States have promised to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, increase the total consumption of renewable energy by 20% and increase energy efficiency by 20%. While commending these efforts, I urge national governments worldwide to collaborate and coordinate concerted efforts towards overcoming the challenges posed by climate change.

Rising temperatures associated with global warming has resulted in sea level rise and droughts which can turn arable land infertile and

make communities uninhabitable, bringing about climate refugees. These are people who will have to leave their homes and communities because of the effects of climate change and global warming, adding to the complex problem of immigration facing so many countries represented here today. Whether we define immigration status as either legal or illegal, in practice irregular immigration can create a considerable strain on an already fragile situation. Malta firmly believes that the challenges of irregular migration in the Mediterranean can only be addressed holistically by affording protection to the vulnerable but also by working with partner countries in Africa to stem the flow of irregular migrants. We must make sure that any migration policies are not in themselves detrimental to the development needs of the country of origin. I am aware this is a long term undertaking, but there is no alternative to enhancing cooperation with partner countries of origin and transit in Africa to address the root causes of migration.

In fact, the Valletta Summit on Migration between the EU Member States and key African partners, which will be held in Malta this November, will be an opportunity to address challenges of migration flows into Europe with important African countries of origin and transit. Through dialogue and cooperation we should strive to enhance the support to countries of origin and transit and cooperate on legal migration while fighting human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants over perilous journeys. Lest we forget, developed countries also need to make progress on integration of immigrants as well as maximising the benefits of migration through tolerance.

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion”. Without ensuring that religious freedom is respected, which is also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, democracy cannot be placed at the service of peace. Violations of the right to freedom of religion take place all over the world and growing religious persecution is a threat to everyone, to both believers and non-believers. All religious faiths are victims of

persecution somewhere in the world. In this supposedly enlightened, tolerant age, people are routinely tortured, jailed and killed for their faith, or lack thereof, in the Divinity, whether it is called God, Allah or Jahweh. We live in a free society where all beliefs are equal. We should love and respect each other irrespective of religious belief; without this love and tolerance we cannot build the world the people want.

To conclude, quoting the draft declaration of this conference, I welcome the new development agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. Every lobby group has pitched in for its own special interest, and although the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group can be very proud of the extensive document it produced, the long set of 169 proposals essentially means that in practice there are no priorities at all. Developing countries seem to think that the more goals there are, the more aid money they will receive but this might not necessarily be the case. At

the moment, Western governments pledged to provide 0.7% of GDP in aid, but unfortunately only about a third of that is actually made available. The implementation of the SDGs require over 1 trillion Euros a year and even without the economic crisis, coming up with this amount of money is not easy.

Developing countries have to make the best out of humanitarian aid they are given, not for the sake of reaching some international milestones, but for the sake of the citizens in those countries and their futures. Whether the proposals are excessively vague or too expensive to meet, it does not take away the responsibilities that elected officials in developing countries have to keep pushing for progress.

Documents do not transform the world, people do.