



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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135th IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

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Outcome document of the General Debate *Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict: Parliaments as early responders*

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(Geneva, 27 October 2016)*

No country is immune to human rights violations. Across the world, there is widespread marginalization, inequality, political exclusion, religious intolerance, poverty and undue restrictions on fundamental freedoms such as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. States continue to fall short of fully delivering on their citizens' civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, to which they have committed through their constitutions and by signing international treaties.

Failure to address human rights challenges not only runs counter to national and international obligations, but can also create a fertile breeding ground for violent conflict if abuses become more serious and widespread. The appeal of those bent on advocating violence to achieve their objectives is bound to increase wherever there is a pervasive lack of respect for human dignity and an airtight lid on the free flow of information and ideas, which are indispensable for democracy to flourish. These situations are often compounded by poor governance, resulting in injustice, whether real or perceived.

Today, the world is witnessing a multitude of conflicts with devastating effects. Parliaments are the guardians of human rights and the rule of law. As parliamentarians, we are the "eyes and ears" of citizens and are familiar with their concerns. We are well-placed to articulate those concerns in parliament. We are therefore at the forefront of raising the alarm and taking action when serious human rights challenges arise.

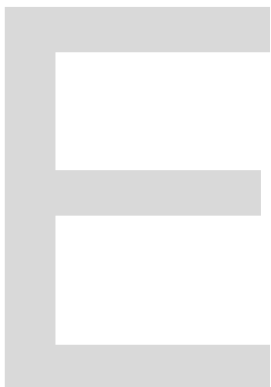
In that regard, we make the following recommendations. They should constitute the overarching framework for the specific action that we must take in order to stem and root out the potential enablers of all types of conflict.

Recommendations

1. Prevent human rights violations

As representatives of the people, we should lead by example and make transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law our guiding principles. We believe that preventing human rights violations directly reduces the risk of conflict. Therefore, we must:

- Ensure that international human rights norms are transposed into domestic legislation; ensure that this legislation is implemented by developing effective policies and programmes, allocating necessary budgets and rigorously overseeing their successful implementation;
- Create effective parliamentary human rights committees that:
 - (i) scrutinize the compatibility of our national legislation with our national and international human rights obligations,



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- (ii) legislate on human rights questions and undertake other initiatives as required,
 - (iii) advise other parliamentary bodies on human rights issues,
 - (iv) have the power to request information, question witnesses and conduct on-site missions;
- Combat gender-based violence and address growing inequality; empower women and girls; address gender stereotypes, including preconceptions about masculinity and violence, by engaging men and boys;
 - Apply a gender-sensitive approach to all parliamentary work and implement innovative measures such as gender equality compliance certificates, which would require all sectors of society to address gender equality and comply with women's rights commitments;
 - Ensure that law enforcement officers always act with the necessary restraint and respect for basic international human rights standards;
 - Promote the creation of early warning mechanisms, which ensure access to accurate and timely information from a wide range of sources, with a view to monitoring changing conflict dynamics on multiple levels; these mechanisms should allow for participation and ownership by a range of stakeholders across the country and contribute to the design of tailor-made responses;
Early warning mechanisms should therefore enable regular exchanges with citizens. In particular, they should focus on outreach to women, as they are in a good position to detect risk factors within the community; hotlines to report human rights violations is one possible example of an early-warning mechanism; such mechanisms should also include gender-specific indicators, such as information on laws and practices that discriminate against women or the rate of domestic and sexual violence;
 - Ensure that violent extremism is prevented and countered, through legislation that advocates dialogue, shuns hate speech and incitement to hatred, and ensures respect for others, in ways that comply with obligations under international law, particularly international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

2. Tackle human rights violations when they occur

When human rights violations do occur, we are often among the first to become aware of them. To avoid such violations degenerating into conflict, we should speak out vigorously against them. We should work tirelessly to find a remedy, whatever the violation, and wherever it occurs. Therefore we must:

- Investigate human rights violations; press for the prosecution of the perpetrators of such violations through an independent and impartial justice system; ensure that court decisions are carried out in full, so that justice is both done and seen to be done;
- Ensure that every person who claims that his or her human rights have not been respected, protected or fulfilled can seek an effective remedy before a competent and independent domestic body vested with the power to order compensation and to have its decisions enforced;
- Ensure the creation of bodies that investigate citizens' allegations regarding violations of their constitutional rights; regularly ask oral and written questions to the government departments in charge of these bodies in order to monitor their functioning, including through receiving updates on the numbers of complaints registered and those still outstanding so as to ensure they are satisfactorily resolved;
- Cooperate with the national human rights commissions to address all human rights violations reported to them;
- Protect MPs at risk: create and implement effective procedures to ensure that MPs can freely express themselves without fear of reprisals, including by ensuring respect for the principle of parliamentary immunity;
- Condemn threats and attacks on parliamentarians, regardless of their backgrounds and views; promote effective investigations into such crimes and the adoption of the necessary security measures;

- Act in solidarity with parliamentarians across the world whose human rights are at risk by systematically raising with the relevant authorities the concerns of the IPU Governing Council about cases brought before it by the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians; never give up on unresolved cases;

3. Build an inclusive and integrated society through closer cooperation with all stakeholders

While promoting human rights so that peace prevails, we should respect the diversity of our societies and ensure that no one is left behind. We can do this by making sure that our decision-making processes are inclusive, and by encouraging all stakeholders to work in close cooperation. Therefore, we must:

- Ensure that our parliaments reflect the diversity of our societies;
- Build a culture of equality, social justice, peace and solidarity throughout our communities, regardless of political views, age, gender, religion or social standing;
- Promote a tolerant society premised on resolving disputes through dialogue;
- Involve all sectors of society, including women, young people, minorities and disadvantaged groups, in the decision-making process through wide-ranging consultation;
- Harness young people's energy and passion by opening spaces for them to contribute locally, nationally and internationally, bearing in mind that young people become strong agents for peace and positive change when they are engaged in their communities and when they are empowered to contribute to policymaking;
- Partner with civil society and non-governmental organizations, especially those who are active in promoting human rights, so that more harmonized and consolidated efforts are made to build and maintain lasting peace.

These recommendations are by no means exhaustive. However, they do provide a basis for our contribution to dealing with human rights violations. We have the means to make significant contributions. All we need is the political will. It should not be so difficult to muster that will, considering the cause that we are defending: the stability of our countries and peace for the people whom we have the privilege to represent.