

STATEMENT

by the Chair of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, V. I. Matvienko
at the Inaugural Ceremony of the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary
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ExpoForum

**Your Excellency Vladimir Vladimirovich,
President Chowdhury,
Secretary General Chungong,
Dear Colleagues,**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to St. Petersburg to the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the President of the IPU Mr. Chowdhury, the Secretary General Mr. Chungong, the Executive Committee and all IPU Member Parliaments for their cooperative and constructive efforts to prepare for this meeting.

We have done our utmost to ensure that our work here will run smoothly, and that all parliamentary delegations will have a comfortable stay.

Our parliamentary family is characterized by an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. We value this highly and will do everything we can to ensure that the unique spirit of this Union remains at the heart of Saint Petersburg's page in IPU history.

I speak honestly when I say that each and every guest is dear to us, and that we want your stay in Saint Petersburg to be one that you will remember for always.

I would particularly like to emphasize the fact that Russia has guaranteed the unhindered entry into the country of all parliamentarians who wished to attend the Assembly from every country in the world, without exception.

We firmly believe in the inadmissibility of the imposition of any type of sanctions against parliamentarians.

Together we have often said that, in these complex times, parliamentary diplomacy remains crucial, and, when traditional diplomatic mechanisms fall short, can be the only means of supporting international dialogue.

The mission of all parliamentarians is to work to seek agreement. To seek agreement, always and everywhere, even where the sound of weapons thunders. In our exchanges, we must launch words, not missiles! I sincerely believe that the collective wisdom of global parliamentarism, which is so prevalent in this room, will serve its intended purpose as the firm foundation for democracy the world over.

Over its 128-year history, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been growing constantly. At this session, IPU Member Parliaments will [...]. I hope that in future, all Member States of the United Nations will become members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, making our organization the *de facto* - and possibly *de jure* - parliamentary arm of the United Nations.

The fusion of universal democratic principles with each culture's unique traditions can lay the foundations for genuine, productive international cooperation.

This is crucial today, when international relations are seeing a distinct decline into confrontation. There should not be nations that teach and nations that learn, those who are right and those who are wrong, those who enjoy privileges while others are cast aside. The language of sanctions is the language of authoritarianism, not the language of democracy.

Often, we see disagreements between States become aggravated to the extreme, the fundamental principles of international law are violated, and interference in the affairs of sovereign States is increasing rapidly. Shared human values are falling victim to political and economic interests. Against this backdrop, the theme of this Assembly, "Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue" seems particularly pertinent. And it is symbolic that this topic will be discussed here, in Russia.

Our country has a unique, experience, which dates back centuries, of the coexistence of people of a variety of ethnicities and religions.

Today, Russia is home to people of 193 nationalities, who use 277 languages and dialects. We have always considered the cultural and religious diversity of our people to be of the utmost importance.

Respect for the diversity of traditions, language and religious beliefs, and continuous cultural exchange is not only the cornerstone of Russian history, but the only possible foundation on which to build a common, global community.

This year, the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, the Assembly will consider a draft resolution on "Sharing our diversity". The resolution underscores the crucial role of parliaments in the contemporary architecture of States, and calls for the strengthening of parliamentary institutions, and the promotion of democratic principles. The peaceful promotion of democracy should be achieved only through voluntary "import" and not through forcible "export".

Furthermore, one clause in the draft resolution suggests designating the anniversary of the founding of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 30 June, as the International Day of Parliamentarism. Putting such a day into the United Nations calendar would help to attract greater attention to the work of parliamentarians, and to raise awareness of the work of the IPU. I propose that this be thought of as the contribution of the Saint Petersburg Assembly to strengthening global parliamentarism.

The draft resolution also calls on parliaments to step up their efforts to achieve equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

The inclusion of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians in the programme of work of the 137th IPU Assembly is also testament to the importance of this issue.

We welcome the work done by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in this regard, and consider gender equality to be one of the key aspects of building democracy.

I am convinced that the equal participation of women in society, political processes and the economy will make the world more honest and more humane. The greater the "female face" of democracy, the more holistic and fair democracy will be.

Dear Colleagues, I would like to express my firm belief that the unique atmosphere of Saint Petersburg – the cultural capital of Russia and one of its most beautiful cities – will facilitate our open and constructive dialogue.

The main events of the Assembly will take place in Tavrichesky Palace, where, at the beginning of the last century, the meetings of the first Russian parliament were held. Now, the Palace houses the headquarters of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This international organization brings together the parliaments of nine Eurasian States, and has recently attained the status of Associate Member of the IPU.

As someone whose life and professional activity have long been closely linked with Saint Petersburg, I am particularly pleased that the participants in this Assembly will be able to witness and fully appreciate all of the enticing beauty of Russia's northern capital, and experience the hospitality of its people.

In this city, where some of the world's greatest minds have lived - Pushkin and Dostoevsky, Roerich and Serov, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky – I have no doubt that we too shall be blessed with inspiration and creative energy.

Welcome to Saint Petersburg!

I wish you all an interesting and productive session!