

Speech at the opening of the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, friends,

I am sincerely glad to welcome you to Russia. We are greatly honoured to host the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union – the oldest international parliamentary organisation – here in Russia, at our home.

I would like to stress that this forum gathered the biggest number of people in the Union's 128-year history: more than 160 delegations, with 96 speakers among them, and 2,400 participants.

The agenda is very rich as well. You will discuss such relevant topics as protection of human rights and freedoms, the fight against terrorism, sustainable global development, and the role of women and young people in politics and economy. I am aware that the work has already started, in fact.

It is symbolic that your meeting takes place in St Petersburg. It was here, in this city, that the first Russian parliament – the State Duma – started its work at the beginning of last century; where parliamentary traditions, law-making practice and parliamentary culture were formed.

This legacy, historical lessons are important for us today too as well as the experience of our foreign colleagues in law-making, party building, your experience, ladies and gentlemen, friends.

In contemporary Russia, the parliament's high status and key powers are stipulated in the fundamental law – the Constitution, which will mark its 25th anniversary next year. At the same time, we will gradually move towards developing democratic, representative institutions of power and enhancing the legislative branch's authority and importance.

Friends, all over the world, parliaments express the will of the people and in doing so play a landmark, substantial, sometimes a leading role in devising national development models and, of course, in searching for efficient answers to modern challenges and threats that are common to all of us.

I believe one of such threats is the erosion of the system of international law and the culture of inter-state dialogue. Unfortunately, this is true, this is today's practice. Like nobody else, you know the value of the law, dialogue and free discussion, as these are the fundamentals of parliamentary work.

This is why, against the current backdrop, parliamentary diplomacy is in such high demand, as it can consolidate trust between states and nations and help find compromise solutions to pressing international and regional problems.

Unfortunately, we are seeing increasingly active attempts to limit direct contacts and communication among law-makers. I am referring to the practice of imposing discriminatory limitations and sanctions, often extending to parliamentarians as well.

We consider such practice unacceptable, harmful and misguided. It is even more counter-productive when rights of entire delegations are infringed upon as part of inter-parliamentary institutions – this happens, unfortunately, too.

In our opinion, this contradicts the principle of free inter-parliamentary cooperation, the sovereign right of each state to express and stand for its point of view in a civilised and open manner.

There are no and can be no unified, template development models in the modern world. Each state has a natural and undisputable right to shape its destiny as stipulated in the UN Charter. Attempts to interfere in the lives of sovereign countries, without understanding or taking into account their national specifics, brings nothing but chaos.

Such ill-considered external interference resulted in the destabilisation of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, escalation of tensions in this region, and growth of the terrorist threat.

We are convinced that terrorism should be fought without double standards, without hidden agendas, without using radicals in anyone else's political interests, and of course this should be done only by joining efforts, only in cooperation. Russia has repeatedly urged others to create a wide international coalition to this end and still believes that building a real partnership to fight terror is critically important.

You are aware of the efforts our country undertakes to stabilise the military and political situation in Syria. In two years, the area under the control of terrorists has halved, a number of large cities have been liberated, and substantial damage has been dealt to terrorists' infrastructure.

I would like to stress: in Syria, we act in coordination with the country's government and strictly in compliance with international law.

Recently, agreements were concluded in the Astana format in Kazakhstan creating four de-escalation zones in Syria. These agreements were reached with the participation of guarantor countries – Russia, Iran and Turkey and with the support of very many other states.

These agreements lay the groundwork for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 2254 based on a direct dialogue between the government and the opposition, uniting their efforts in the interest of the quickest possible eradication of this hotbed of terrorism, and establishment of peace and preservation of Syria's unity.

I believe it is time for the international community to think about post-war restoration of the state. In what forms and volumes must aid be rendered to this and other countries in the region, how can we contribute to their socioeconomic development more efficiently, to the consolidation of state institutions, including the legislative branch.

I am sure you will agree that such tasks are worth being discussed at the parliamentary and inter-parliamentary levels.

Colleagues, it is in our shared interest to promote a peaceful, creative and balanced agenda, to aspire to reduce strife, prevent the emergence of new separating lines, including ethnic

and religious ones, jointly move towards shaping a more just and solid architecture of international relations.

I am convinced that the overwhelming majority of parliamentarians share this approach.

I wish success and all the best to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its participants.

Thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen. I declare the Assembly's 137th session open.