

Draft Speech on ‘Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through Inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue’ for the use of HS during the 137th Assembly of IPU at St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, 14-18 October 2017.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I sincerely thank the Russian Parliament and IPU for the excellent hospitality and arrangements made for the 137th Assembly of IPU. I believe that the world is a gift to us from God who created it like a bouquet of flowers . This world is blessed with diverse religions, faiths, ethnicities and cultural traditions, each one attractive in its own way. When held together by eternal values of love, compassion, justice and equity, they provide us supreme joy and delight.

IPU needs to be complemented for selection of a very relevant topic for general debate as entire world is grappling with various kind of conflicts in the name of religion, faith or ethnicity. The diversity of our world should not be a pretext for conflict, but should be seen as a treasure that enriches us all. I believe that mutual tolerance and respect among religions and ethnic groups is absolutely essential for peace, harmony, decorum and social order on our earth. Every mother brings up her son or daughter to be responsible, respectful and caring towards parents and society and have right values. Similarly all religions teach their followers to practice love,

compassion and be good human beings steeped in right ethos. Pluralism is not diversity alone, but *energetic engagement with diversity*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and debate, give and get, speaking and listening. Dialogue fosters mutual understanding, dignity and patience and promotes peaceful co-existence.

Friends, India is one of the largest and most plural societies in the world and the singular thing about Indian culture is that you can only speak of it in the plural. Our great cultural heritage is the generous concept of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam (meaning that the entire world is a family). Our society is based on spiritualism, humanism and giving less importance to materialistic growth. We are socially, politically, culturally, religiously and spiritually democratic. As a result a number of religions and religious ideas have taken birth and flourished in our country. Different languages, music, dance and other art forms have developed in India. Our accommodating ethos sheltered many religions coming from outside our boundaries. The spread of Indian Culture has never been oppressive in character; rather it is educative and elevating. In fact, wherever Indians have gone, they have left behind not only their footprints but also spiritual and cultural imprints in the hearts of people.

We have shown to the world that different religions, languages, practices and beliefs can co-exist and prosper simultaneously. India believes in giving and being there for others.

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which means that the person who gives enjoys a higher position and not the person who hoards or accumulates. Like the clouds which give rain are always up in the sky, while the sea is always on the ground.

A nation's culture resides in the hearts and the soul of its people. In India we inculcate this in our children. We celebrate our diversity and plurality. This is the virtue of India's parliamentary democracy and Indian ethos. The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, speech, education and culture and also ensures that the duties and rights travel together. Parliaments and Parliamentarians have a very responsible role to play in fostering the culture of inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue. The

Parliament of India has been playing a significant role in providing necessary safeguards and an enabling environment for peaceful co-existence of religions, faiths and diverse groups. By sharing of knowledge and best practices, I am sure, we can enrich ourselves, and together we can resolve to building a harmonious world.

Thank you.
