

APA PLENARY SESSION
Phnom Penh-Cambodia, 7-12 December 2015

GENERAL DEBATE

"Promoting Peace, Reconciliation and Dialogue in Asia"

Mrs. Stella Mishiaouli-Demetriou, MP (Cyprus)

Honourable Chairperson

Esteemed Colleagues,

Parliaments have a vital role to play in peace-building processes, in transforming a potentially violent conflict into a non-violent dialogue, aimed at creating consensus.

Parliaments are the ultimate expression of democracy and have an important role to play in preventing internal conflicts. Parliaments should ensure that all interested parties are represented in relevant peace building efforts and especially vulnerable social groups that are more likely to be affected by conflict.

Decision-making should be based on consensus in an attempt to build bridges between parties with conflicting interests. The opportunities for opposition parties to contribute to peace-building differ depending on the situation. When a country is affected by an internal violent conflict, parliamentarians have the potential to act as a bridge for dialogue and reconciliation between the conflicting parties and by putting forward confidence-building measures, which are essential when engaging in negotiations.

The contribution of civil societies can also be very important. Civil society groups, represent the wider society and parliaments should be ready to cooperate with civil society to encourage information flow and to gain greater support in efforts for conflict-resolving processes.

Free and responsible media can also play a significant role in disseminating information, and help parliaments to build a dialogue between conflicting parties. Parliamentarians can actually use this valuable tool in their efforts to resolve conflict situations or, better, to help prevent them, through dialogue.

In this respect the importance of a diverse media sector should be stressed. In order to assist the role of the media and in acknowledging this, parliaments should encourage the introduction of legislation that ensures the right to information and freedom of speech and does not restrict public service broadcasting.

Conflicts can arise from a variety of reasons: economic interests, race, ethnicity, religion, cultural differences, poverty or, from the overall absence of good governance and, on many occasions, simple aggression and expansionism.

The world today faces great political and financial instability. In order to achieve peace and prosperity we must first strive to tackle political instability, corruption and the surge of fanaticism and blind violence. In these efforts, regional collaboration is crucial. Our focus should be on policies that promote social stability and lay the foundations for a peaceful and prosperous Asia. As key issues in this respect, we identify the improvement of access to health, education and social protection for all, regardless of sex, race, social standing, religion or ethnic origin.

A key goal should always be to promote regional exchanges and cooperation, by developing both formal and informal networks and participating in regional institutions and inter-parliamentary bodies. These fora constitute a valuable framework for promoting dialogue and reconciliation, and help in confidence building and in facilitating learning between members of a region. They can also help mediate in disputes, by providing a neutral place for dialogue.

Parliaments can be effective in conflict resolution, when giving full effect to their status as rule of law institutions, by legislating wisely, by upholding judicial independence and by ensuring executive accountability. This is the fundamental role of parliamentarians, that commits every one of us.

I thank you for your attention.

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