

Speech René van der Linden at the World Speakers Conference in Geneva, July 2010

Let me first of all thank the preparatory committee and especially the IPU President, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, for organizing this conference and for the way he has welcomed us in this beautiful city of Geneva! This is the third time that we as Presidents of Parliaments of the world meet to discuss interesting topics such as promoting international cooperation and democratic structures, and the crucial role that parliaments play in this area. During this conference we discuss the role of parliaments in a world that in many ways shows signs of a global crisis. We also reflect on the responsibility that we as parliamentarians bear for political and social stability in our societies, especially in times of crises.

The recent financial and economic crisis is the result of a financial system that has come apart at the seams, where greed - particularly in the banking sector - has led to irresponsible behaviour at the executive level. As a result of this, the national debt has run completely out of control in the prosperous part of the world and we are living at the expense of future generations.

A reconsideration of the structure of the international economy is mandatory. The outcome of this reconsideration could lead to multiple answers and solutions. An interesting question is whether the unification of Europe as a political and economic system has also led to an integration of the original concepts of the structure of the economy.

Mr. President,

We have a collective responsibility for creating a social and political community in Europe that frees us from group egoism and the individual greed that have characterized our economies in the last decade and have brought them in a state of crisis. It is important that we in this community set up a social market economy in which human dignity is a focal point. An economy with a private and a public sector in which the consequences of our actions for current and future generations are taken into account. With this sharpened awareness, sustainability, management of raw materials and the fight against poverty are central elements. In Europe there is a need for a new social and political community founded on a totally different attitude, characterized by a long term vision.

A mental and political innovation is necessary in order to achieve such a new community. This innovation is only possible if we deepen the structures of our democracies and the rule of law. Values such as the right to a fair trial, equality between men and women, freedom of opinion and expression and the rights of minorities will have to be widely shared and supported to reach a deeper understanding. The basis for stability and security lies in respecting the rule of law and human rights. Parliaments play a crucial role through the practice of parliamentary diplomacy. Especially in an open world, the elected representatives are bound to play an active role, not only domestically but also in international forums. By working together we can provide a deeper embedding of the rule of law and human rights in this new community.

In this new community - in addition to the rule of law and human rights - fostering social cohesion and the respect of cultural diversity are of paramount importance. Social cohesion should be promoted in order to combat poverty and thus to protect the safety and stability within the community. Cultural diversity is something we encounter more and more in this further globalizing world. The attitude

and principles that we can mobilize from our parliamentary traditions, determine whether we see cultural pluralism as a stumbling block or merely as a challenge. More than ever the cultural and religious dialogue is the binding factor in a globalizing world. Respect and tolerance must substitute prejudice and exclusion.

Again this requires a special role for parliamentary diplomacy. Members of parliament in particular, are able to bridge these gaps, due to their independence from their national governments. Parliamentarians play a complementary role alongside the government. They indeed are not bound by government agreements and can therefore operate on an equal footing departing from common international goals.

Mr. President,

The crisis has exposed weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the system. This crisis may advance the world if we take the appropriate measures. As parliaments we can do more in setting the agenda. We have waited too long to address fundamental problems in our international forums. We can no longer afford not to raise such problems. How many crises do we need to produce the political resolve to put the global issues on the agenda?

It is the role of national parliaments to set the agenda for interparliamentary deliberation through mutual contacts. The agenda should have a long term perspective with tolerance and solidarity as the guiding principles. Parliaments should not only reflect the electoral composition of the nation, but it should also lead the electorate towards a more international mindset.

I call on parliaments represented here to use the existing structures for regular exchanges of views so as to influence national authorities in a coordinated way, to establish an international agenda and a common policy. Parliamentary pressure is necessary to free governments from the constriction of balancing national interests and short term visions. By giving parliamentary diplomacy a more prominent position in our work, we can give shared objectives - such as combating poverty, hunger and violations of human rights - a more prominent place on the international agenda and give substance to our responsibility for the welfare of our peoples.

Thank you for your attention.