

134th IPU ASSEMBLY

Lusaka, 19-23 March 2016

General debate on:

Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth

Address of Dr Milorad Mijatovic, member of the standing delegation, authorised Head of the Serbian Delegation at the 134th IPU Assembly

Honourable Chair,

Secretary General,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the fact that today, young people comprise one-fifth of the total world's population, less than 2 % of MPs are under the age of 30. This is a devastating fact and calls for urgent action.

I would like to underscore that I am not particularly worried about the situation in welfare states and developed democracies, as these societies have created strong mechanisms of political and social participation, and most of the young people have a pretty good economic status and prospect of a quality life. I am worried about the situation in developing countries and transitional ones with a low level of economic and democratic development. In those countries young people have grim and worrying prospects for the future. The lack of good prospects and absence of participation in main political developments, and the fact that they can not influence any change in their own countries are pushing the young towards extremism. The greatest threat comes from terrorism, religious fundamentalism, organised crime and extreme and populist political options. I believe that this is one of the main causes of extremist movements which instigated the current situation in the Middle East and the force resettlement of millions of people due to conflicts. What is particularly worrying is that young people from around the world, even from developed European states are responding to the calls of terrorists and extremists, leaving their homes, families and friends and going to war.

In those less developed countries, young people need to have their say, their struggle for change needs to be supported, and their passion encouraged, but the means they are using need to be legal and institutionalised. War and terrorism have not brought any good to anyone. We need to find a way to convey this message to younger generations. We need to help them boost their self-confidence and awareness about how they can change their lives and the destiny of their nations if they stay committed to building highly functional democratic institutions which will be efficient in meeting the needs of the future generations. We know that modernization that has brought prosperity for societies and countries throughout history, was always brought about by the young people.

Young people in Serbia are faced with many problems. Economic insecurity and lack of employment are the most acute ones. However, I think that considerable improvement occurred regarding the political participation and parliamentary representations, which is reflected in greater participation of younger people in political life in Serbia. I am proud to say that this Parliament is the youngest in the history of Serbia with 97 MPs under the age of 46, which amounts to 38,8%. And these younger colleagues, fellow MPs were instrumental for informal networking and cooperation with other MPs on important issues which concern their position and broader social situation. They have initiated creation of all-party parliamentary groups - Women's Parliamentary Network, Economic Caucus and the Greens group.

Dear Colleagues,

Democracy is an instrument that free citizens can use to establish proper governance in the interest of their societies. We need to bring democracy closer to the young, explain to them that it can be adjusted and modernised and thus more efficient so that it can better cater to the needs of the people. They need to be encouraged to assume responsibility and take democracy into their own hands. Because these are their institutions, their democracy, their societies and their countries. Democracy is not something that belongs to others, that is usurped or rigid. I am absolutely certain that young people have capacity and can change democratic institutions, and that they will be able to adjust them to suit their own needs which will be crucial for the vitality of every democratic society.

Thank you very much for your attention.