

Draft Speech, MP Jane Heitmann (Denmark)

The General Debate at the IPU-Session, 26-30 November 2021, Madrid:

Contemporary challenges to democracy

Chairpersons, Fellow parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure for me to address this unique assembly.

I am representing the Liberal Party – the largest opposition party in the Danish parliament. First time I was elected to the parliament was back in 2011.

I value the work of the IPU a lot because it is a very important global forum for dialogue between parliamentarians. We do not necessarily represent our government back home. We represent our own political convictions and beliefs.

Sometimes we don't even agree within our national IPU-delegations. That is not a sign of weakness in my opinion. On the contrary, that is a true reflection of the democratic composition of our national parliaments.

Democracy is not just a way of making decisions. Democracy is much more. It is also about protecting the rights of minorities and other vulnerable groups in our societies.

A true democracy must be representative and inclusive. Unfortunately our democracies are not always so inclusive as we sometimes think.

Strong democracies rests upon high quality education - for children as well as for adults. High quality education provide students with the ability to engage in society and political life and give them the courage to speak up! Locally and globally.

However high quality education is not a one-size-fits all model.

Let me share with you a serious concern for a particularly group of citizens: Those who are suffering from various kinds of mental disorders. They are too often lost in our educational systems.

In Denmark ADHD is one of the most common mental disorders affecting children. Untreated ADHD can cause problems throughout life. People with ADHD often have hard to succeed in school, at work, in relationships and ultimately in the democracy.

Let me provide you with some facts from Denmark:

- Almost two third of young people with ADHD have not finished a youth education.
- Two third of adults diagnosed with ADHD are unemployed.
- Peoples suffering from ADHD have a significant higher risk of getting convicted for crimes against persons.

In the Danish Parliament my party, the Liberal Party, has been putting pressure on the government since the last general election in 2019 to put forward a new 10 year plan for the psychotherapy.

Now, finally it looks like the government are taking the first step to live up to their promises from the election campaign back in 2019. In the beginning of next year the government and the Danish Health Authority has invited the parties in Parliament to a presentation of a first draft for a future 10 year plan for the psychotherapy. Needless to say that I, and my party, will engage strongly in this process.

One could also mention other groups with special needs. For instance, people diagnosed with dyslexia very often find it difficult to involve in the democratic, political life.

The Danish Dyslexia Association, founded in 1943, estimate that 7-8 per cent of the Danish population to some extent suffer from dyslexia. Even though the Danish educational system have improved over the last years, when it comes to dealing with dyslexia, there are still room for improvements, and there are no quick fixes to this challenge.

Let me finish my presentation by high lighting the very concerning development in Afghanistan since the fall of the Afghan government in late August.

Even though secondary schools seems to have reopened in the country we must continue to insist on right to education for all children in Afghanistan – girls and boys. It is critical that all girls, including older girls, are able to

resume their education without further delays. For that, we of course also need female teachers to resume teaching.

Girls cannot, and must not, be left in behind. Not in Afghanistan and not anywhere else.

High quality education is one of the major pillars in our democracies.

Thank you very much for your attention.