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### Concept note for the General Debate on

### *Parliaments as platforms to enhance education for peace, security and the rule of law*

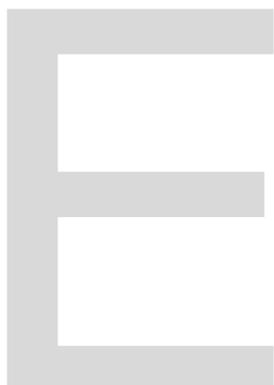
Peace, security, and the rule of law are enduring objectives of the international community. Yet despite tremendous efforts, including the development of robust international institutions and mechanisms, these goals remain elusive. Disconcertingly, evidence shows that we are moving in the opposite direction. The 2018 Global Peace Index showed a deteriorated global situation for the fourth consecutive year. The World Justice Project's research showed similar backsliding for the rule of law.

The cost of failing to reverse this trend is perilous not just for human life and well-being, but also more broadly for the planet. Peace, security and the rule of law are not just ends in themselves, but also preconditions for addressing the immense challenges faced across the globe. Without them, collective efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and protect the environment will not have the expected results.

One reason why peace, security and the rule of law have been elusive is because the resources for their achievement are not always evenly allocated. Military action and formal international bodies are often priority areas of investment. However, at the forefront of people's minds are peace, security and the rule of law. As the United Nations Secretary-General stated, to achieve peace and security "We must teach our children love before others teach them hate". The key to this is education.

Education is a human right. Enshrined in international conventions, the State has a responsibility to provide accessible, quality education to all its citizens. Education is also a public good that serves State interests. From Costa Rica to Finland, there is overwhelming evidence that investing in education offers a strong return on investment for more peaceful, happier, and prosperous societies.

SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the link between education and peace. Target 7 of SDG 4 calls on governments to ensure education for human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and cultural diversity. It reinforces the idea that education is more than about having smarter people and transferring skills; it is also about shaping more peaceful global citizens. It helps people better understand the world, participate in public life, and lead more meaningful and peaceful lives.



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Yet education models today are too often inadequate and peace, security and the rule of law are threatened when people are unemployed and destitute of hope for their future. Although training people as workers and economic stakeholders is important, in addition to preparing people for jobs, education also shapes worldviews and mind-sets. A memorable teacher can inspire for a lifetime. Education that goes beyond memorizing information, to including soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, and creativity, is also essential. With these skills, people are better equipped to respond to challenges, engage in constructive dialogue, and transform their societies for the better.

Education as an enabler of dialogue is also key to countering destructive narratives, combatting xenophobia and preventing extremism that can lead to violence. It is a powerful tool to bring about more inclusive societies and promote universally shared values of peace, freedom, equality and human dignity. Democracy needs democrats. Educating young people on democratic values, human rights and civic responsibility helps secure the foundation for peace, security, and the rule of law for future generations.

As a human right, education must be accessible. This is particularly important for children and youth. However, 262 million of them are out of school. Only 23 per cent of young refugees attend secondary school. As these young people grow older, failure to include them in education systems is not only a recipe for desperation and despair, but it is also a waste of their valuable potential. Even for the very youngest children, the care and support they receive in their pre-school years have a major impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development, and this will stay with them for a lifetime.

Education that leaves no one behind also means accessibility for women and girls. According to UNESCO, almost a quarter of young women aged 15 to 24 in developing countries have never completed primary school. Gender discrimination in education is a destabilizing factor for society. Girls' unequal access to education due to pregnancy, poverty, and early marriage, leads to inequalities in society that fuel intolerance and violence, hamper development, and make women and girls vulnerable to abuse. Ensuring equal access of girls and women to all sectors of education is therefore a pillar for peaceful, safe, resilient and prosperous societies.

Education must also be a life-long opportunity. As the tectonic plates of technology and globalization change the world, continuous training for people of all ages in a quickly evolving job market is more important than ever before. Education holds the key to moving away from a future of unemployment, to one of redeployment.

Agile and responsive political institutions are therefore needed. As lawmakers and representatives of the people, parliamentarians have a powerful role to play. Legislation, such as for free and compulsory education, can make a powerful difference. By prioritizing investment in education in state budgets, including through fair student loans and grants, the dividends of a smarter and more peaceful society can be achieved. Through oversight, governments can be held to account to ensure that curricula promote peace and tolerance, and that education policies are continuously improved to meet the needs of tomorrow. Parliaments can make a powerful difference.

The IPU and its Member Parliaments have already stressed that quality education is essential to foster greater respect for democratic values (1993),<sup>1</sup> for a sustained state of democracy (1997),<sup>2</sup> for the equal participation of men and women in political life, and for the development of peoples (2001).<sup>3</sup> More recently, in October 2017, IPU Members committed to working towards cultural pluralism and peace by, among others, the teaching of soft skills and human rights education.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution on *The implementation of educational and cultural policies designed to foster greater respect for democratic values*, 89<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Conference, New Delhi, 17 April 1993, <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/89-2.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, 98<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Conference, Cairo, 16 September 1997, <http://archive.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution on *Education and culture as essential factors in promoting the participation of men and women in political life and as prerequisites for the development of peoples*, 105<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Conference, Havana, 6 April 2001, <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/105-2.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> St. Petersburg Declaration on *Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue*, 137<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, St. Petersburg, 18 October 2017, <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/137/SPB-declaration.pdf>.

The General Debate at the 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to share experiences and good practices on how to enhance education for peace, security and the rule of law. The outcome of the debate will also serve as a parliamentary contribution to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), in July 2019, which will review implementation of SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

In preparing for the debate, participants may wish to consider the following questions:

- How can MPs promote comprehensive and innovative educational frameworks that develop forward-looking knowledge and skills, while promoting understanding, tolerance and respect for human dignity?
- What good practices and innovations in your country's education models have contributed to peace, security and the rule of law? How can these be shared to inspire other successful initiatives?
- Which laws and policies have been successful to achieve access to, and completion of, high-quality primary, secondary, and post-secondary education, especially for girls, young women, and men and women in vulnerable situations?
- What actions has your parliament taken to promote a life-long education approach in and out of school in order to provide continuous learning opportunities for people of all ages?
- How can MPs promote a model of education that enables peace by countering intolerance, xenophobia, extremism leading to violence and hate speech, and do so also through the media?
- What is the role of other stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, the private sector, trade unions, local communities, religious groups, and political parties in advancing education for peace, security and the rule of law?