

*General Debate – IPU Assembly*

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

Hon Anne Tolley, New Zealand

April 2019

Tena koutou katoa. Greetings colleagues.

I am Anne Tolley, Deputy Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives. It is an honour to be here today to join you in discussing this vital issue – an issue that has hit so close to home for us in New Zealand in recent weeks.

Friday, 15 March 2019 is a day that will be etched into the minds of New Zealanders forever. A terrorist attack claimed the lives of 50 innocent people who called New Zealand their home, and had every right to be safe in our country.

On behalf of our Parliament and the people of New Zealand, I'd like to first take this opportunity to thank our inter-parliamentary colleagues who sent messages of condolence and support following one of our country's darkest days. I have also been humbled by the love and support that everyone in our country has shown towards our Muslim community in the wake of this incident, and the way in which we united to send the clear message that hate has no place on our shores. It is times like these I am immensely proud to represent New Zealand on the world stage.

The public response to this atrocity, both at home and abroad, was encouraging. However it also highlighted the importance of continuously promoting peace and security in the modern world.

As the theme of this Assembly's General Debate suggests, quality education is one of the most effective ways to achieve this. Education is a fundamental cornerstone of any healthy society. I think you'll all agree with me that Parliaments around the world have such a central role to play in this. As legislatures, our role is to not only write the laws that shape our countries, but also to foster a culture in which the values promoted by these laws are tangibly enacted.

During my time in the New Zealand Parliament, and especially my time as Minister of Education and Minister for Social Development in the previous Government, I've seen first-hand how good practices and innovations can develop education models that contribute to peace and social wellbeing. I would like to share some of these with you today.

Respect – not just for oneself, but for everyone, regardless of background – is a value that is woven into the very fibre of our country's public education system. The New Zealand Curriculum is the guiding document for education in our country, setting out what we want students to know and to be able to do. It is a statement of what we deem to be important in education – but it is also so much more than that.

A section of the curriculum is dedicated to listing the values we want to instil in every student in New Zealand. Perhaps the most pertinent of these to our discussion today is respect: for oneself, for others, and for human rights. Other values include diversity, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages; and equity, through fairness and social justice. By encouraging these values in students from the very start of their schooling journey, New Zealand prides itself on producing model citizens who respect all and contribute to a peaceable society.

Of course, this high-level approach helps set the foundation for a peace-promoting education model, but we're aware that to effect real change, it has to go deeper. Parliaments need to identify the segments of the population that are most vulnerable and provide the support they need to flourish, with education initiatives one of the most powerful ways to achieve this.

Over the years, the New Zealand Parliament has introduced policies to improve access to and completion of quality primary, secondary, and post-secondary education, especially for young women and people from marginalised communities. During my time as Minister for Social Development, we invested heavily into education services for children in care, for instance through our Extraordinary Care Fund. This ensured that young people in care received the support they needed to succeed in school, avoid falling behind, and lay the foundations for a positive future, during such a critical stage of their development.

Māori and Pasifika communities represent a significant part of New Zealand's population; significant both in terms of their size and their unique place in our country's history. New Zealand's Pasifika population, in particular, is young, diverse, and growing quickly. Governments in New Zealand have consistently made education and employment support for Māori and Pasifika a priority, to ensure they have an equal footing in our society. Examples from the previous Government include the establishment of Tai Wānanga, a secondary school with a uniquely Māori environment, and a Pasifika Education Plan, which focused on raising achievement among Pasifika students.

Looking back at the efforts of New Zealand's governments past and present, I'm proud of the targeted and systematic education policies that were introduced to support our most vulnerable groups. In my time as Minister alone, I oversaw successful initiatives aimed to directly improve the educational and career prospects of teenage parents, prisoners, the long-term unemployed, families of gang members, and so many more. One of the best ways to improve the lives of traditionally marginalised peoples is to equip them with the education and employment opportunities that give them a second chance at life.

I'd like to finish by touching on what we, as Parliaments, can be doing ourselves to promote peace, security, and the rule of law in our countries and across the world. Parliaments don't need to be just a platform to enhance these aspects of society. As one of the central institutions of any democracy, we can play a first-hand role in promoting them. As a relatively small legislature, New Zealand's Parliament prides itself on its cultural diversity and ever-improving gender balance – earlier this year, the proportion of women in our Parliament passed the 40% mark.

Our Parliament is increasingly reflective of modern New Zealand society, and as such we actively promote Parliament as a place where people of all backgrounds are welcome. We strive to be open and transparent, and take a proactive role in engaging with the public and supporting civics education. By leading by example, Parliaments can help citizens follow suit and contribute to a harmonious global society.

New Zealand is continuing to recover from the unprecedented attack last month. Our national spirit is unshaken and we will rise stronger than before. We cannot underestimate the power of education to shape a safe and peaceful world, and I encourage all of us here today to reflect on how we can all work together to attain this common goal.

Thank you.