



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Speaking notes

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Roundtable on parliamentary responses to
forced displacement in IGAD countries

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I am very pleased to be here today at this parliamentary roundtable on forced displacement in IGAD countries. From the outset, let me thank UNHCR and the Center for European Policy Studies for partnering with us on this important initiative.

We have just heard Assistant High Commissioner Gillian Triggs' strong message regarding the Global compact for refugees and her call to action.

We all know that the **Global Compact on Refugees is an ambitious commitment** seeking to bring comprehensive and sustainable solutions to the plight of refugees and host communities. **Implementing this commitment calls for a multi-stakeholder approach, recognizing that it is only by joining forces that progress will be achieved.**

A multitude of actors have to play their role and parliaments are one of them.

The issue of refugees, their protection and rights, is very much at the heart of the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The **IPU works for peace, democracy and the well-being of all**. It is therefore not surprising that the plight of displaced women and men is high on the organization's agenda, as parliament's fundamental role is to represent and defend the rights of all, without exception, and to work towards the peaceful and sustainable development of societies. The work on enforced displacement has been led by the Committee to Promote respect for international humanitarian law, whose Chair, Agnes Vadai, I salute today.

We know that addressing the plight of refugees and supporting host communities need to go hand in hand. Any response has to be comprehensive, addressing both of these dimensions. The engagement of national actors and communities, as well as regional and international actors is therefore key.

We also know that for sustainability purposes, root causes of displacement must be addressed as well. This means conflict resolution, peacebuilding and reconciliation; it means better governance; it means tackling inequality, security and climate change, all of which can lead to displacement.

In short – any meaningful response requires political engagement, partnerships and cooperation.

Hence – again – the importance of parliamentary action.

So how can parliaments make a difference?

1. **First – by legislating. Building state systems to prevent and respond to such human tragedies is a first step. Legislation and legislative reform** are two of the primary aspects of meeting the needs of and protecting both those who are fleeing and host communities. **Such frameworks must, however, be inclusive and particularly sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable.**

Parliaments and parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, are well placed to listen to the people and to ensure that all voices are heard and taken into account. This includes refugees and stateless persons.

2. **Second - Effective implementation:** We also know that laws are only as good as the effort and resources put into them. This means **constant monitoring of the impact of laws and budgets aimed at supporting enforcement programmes and structures.**

For members of parliament, it means regularly questioning the government on implementation, and scrutinizing and adopting resources for impact.

And here again, we have seen MPs holding their governments to account and reallocating resources during budgetary debates, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and the voiceless.

3. **Third - parliaments' link with citizens is of the essence.** That link is the key to building a common understanding; working towards a conducive, open environment; and overcoming stereotypes and discrimination.

As opinion leaders and shapers, parliamentarians need to lead the way and explain and address the many misconceptions surrounding refugees. Members of parliament, as opinion leaders, can and do spread the word –they engage with their constituents on a regular basis, they listen and explain so that those who have no voice are represented as well. **By so doing they remind all of us that behind figures and data are human beings, women and men, whose rights need to be defended and respected.**

There is much to do; the potential for action and results are there; expectations are high.

Over 20 years ago the IPU began working on international humanitarian law and refugee protection issues because it discovered that parliaments were largely unaware of international commitments undertaken by States and the consequences of those commitments at the national level.

We have developed our activities in close partnership with UNHCR. The common objective has been to sensitize and support parliaments and parliamentarians in their efforts.

At our 2019 IPU Assembly in Serbia, we adopted, at the initiative of the IHL Committee, two sets of pledges to support the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and the *IBelong* campaign to end statelessness. These pledges focus on continued mobilization MPs' political engagement, and in particular women and young MPs; raising awareness and support to action.

The task facing us is a daunting one and will require engagement by parliaments and with parliaments. It will require all those involved in refugee issues to work together. This is why I very much welcome this dialogue today between MPs from different parties, countries and regions.

I am convinced that parliaments – by joining forces with each other and with other actors – will make the difference, and you can count on the IPU to facilitate and support such dialogue and cooperation.