

Claudia Roth, German Delegation

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Speech for the IPU Assembly General Debate: Parliaments as platforms to enhance education for peace, security and the rule of law

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

What is the role of parliaments?

Our task – as the beating hearts of democracy – is to shape tomorrow's world.

We have a mandate, an obligation to scrutinise our governments, that's right; but above all, our task is to take responsibility, to empower future generations to live in dignity on our planet. So the theme of today's debate – enhancing education for peace, security and the rule of law – sums up the essence of our work very well: it is about looking ahead and doing everything in our power to ensure that those who come afterwards have every opportunity to live in peace and security.

It is described no differently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to article 1:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

This is a wonderfully powerful declaration of commitment that puts people at the top of the agenda.

It is a statement of commitment that describes the universality, inalienability and indivisibility of human rights, and therefore the fundamental equality of EVERYONE on this planet. It is our shared foundation, the bond that holds us together – but above all, it is a reminder that, despite all the crises and conflicts, we should not lose sight of the fundamentals: to bequeath our children a world that guarantees them a life in dignity. This is no easy task in a world in disorder, a world where those who hold the rule of law in contempt, the enemies of democracy, the opponents of equality and pluralism are growing stronger. It is no easy task in a world which confronts us with colossal challenges, a world where 263 million children and teenagers are not in school, and 70 million people are displaced.

Despite that, however – no, precisely BECAUSE of that – we have even more of a responsibility, as members of the world's parliaments, to persevere in making the world a better place, and to put human dignity at the heart of our efforts.

The objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement and the aim of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its Goal 4 on quality education, with its Goal 16 on peace and justice, are no different.

Merely describing such objectives, however, is not enough.

It is our responsibility to work towards full IMPLEMENTATION of these international commitments.

And in all of this, the work starts, as always, in our own backyard.

I say that explicitly as a Member of the German Bundestag, and as a representative of an industrial nation. For, of course, OUR WAY of running our economies, OUR MODEL of consumption and production DO impact, sometimes severely, on the reality of life in the Global South.

So with that in mind, and if we put our focus on the dignity and rights of every individual, that means: combating the causes of displacement, such as inequality and the systematic violation of human rights, not the refugees.

It means NO arms exports to countries and governments that incite wars or violate human rights. It means opting instead to harness the power of education, of books, of dialogue and cooperation.

Above all, however, we should stop acting as if we had a Planet B. When UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres describes the climate crisis as "a matter of life and death", he is not exaggerating at all. He is simply making clear the dramatic, the extreme nature of the reality. Indeed, for millions of people, including millions of children around the world, the climate crisis, climate-induced migration and displacement ceased to be hypothetical a long time ago. For them, the climate crisis means drought or floods, melting glaciers or species extinction. It means the loss of homeland, of cultures that are thousands of years old, a threat to peace and security. And, once again, the worst impacts of the climate crisis are felt mainly by people in the Global South: in other words, by the very people who – from a historical perspective – bear least responsibility for global warming.

Ladies and gentlemen,

all of this is challenging us, including in the context of today's debate. Because, if we look at the next generation, we see the first to feel the tangible effects of climate change – and the last that can still halt the climate crisis, or at least limit global warming to 1.5°C. So let us be serious about the work of our parliaments. Let us face up to the responsibility that rests on our shoulders as legislators. And instead of nations attempting to go it alone, let us ensure that our thinking transcends borders – including here in the IPU. In other words, let us build bridges instead of walls, let us stand together instead of creating divisions – in our politics, including education policy, and in the way we deal with one another every day.

Ladies and gentlemen,

article 1 of the German constitution, the Basic Law, states:

"Human dignity shall be inviolable."

And it applies to EVERYONE. This, no less, must be our guiding principle and our primary goal.

Thank you.