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Speech by Ms. Riitta Myller, Head of the Finnish delegation at the 140th IPU Assembly in Doha on the General Debate theme:

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

Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Parliamentarians,

I wish to begin by thanking our hosts for making it possible to meet here in Doha on a short notice. Dialogue is always valuable - in our national parliaments of course, but also here on the international forum. In our General debate on Parliaments as peace education platforms, I wish to highlight three points: the role of parliaments in safeguarding the will of the people while always respecting the rights of the minority; the value of the education system for the whole society; and finally the relevance to the big picture globally.

Dear Colleagues,

as we all know parliamentarians represent the people. We have been given a mandate to draft laws, supervise the government, pass budgets and debate important topical issues. Usually parliamentarians also seek to renew their mandate running campaigns with various political agendas and representing different interests. However, the quest for another term or a seat in the government should never happen at the expense of human rights of others. If that happens we lose something dear to us. That is, the Rule of Law on which our societies should be based on.

A few weeks ago I read the news that Finland got the top spot in the UN World Happiness Report for the second year in a row. As a typical Finn I immediately doubted the results but then thought that it would be interesting to know what the contributing factors behind the results are. Personal happiness of course is a sum of many factors and obviously economic factors play a part in the equation. The biggest factor, however, is social security. The starting point should be a solid foundation to build on. We can ask ourselves: Can I live without fear? Can I speak out freely and even critically of the political leadership? Do we have free media? And can I count on being treated fairly in the legal system? If we do not get a clear YES as an answer to all these basic questions it is very difficult to start building a well-fare state based on Rule of Law. And as we know, we cannot build high towers if the foundation is not solid.

Education is a human right in itself, but it is also the bedrock on which well-being rests in many societies. My home country Finland managed to make a transition from a poor agrarian society into a modern well-fare state during the latter part of the 20th century. The tools for the transition were equal opportunities for all and heavy investment in education. Free education, including university level, has in fact been the strongest factor in guaranteeing equal opportunities for everyone in our society. A strong school system, leaving no one behind will also give everyone a chance to pursue a place in higher education. Gender equality has for a long time been one of the cornerstones of the Finnish society and this can also be seen in education. In 2017 women accounted for 58 per cent of university graduates. In recent years there has been increasing discussion on finding ways to keep also boys motivated for school. It also makes economic sense to invest in the society bringing everyone on board. Furthermore, the better educated people are, the better equipped they are in critically evaluating any information they come across, be that

information related to local politics or global environmental policy. This is the development we parliamentarians should be encouraging, not the other way around. In today's interconnected world with global challenges, like stopping the perilous trend of global warming, shared global responsibility is of key importance.

Finally, I believe fair and inclusive societies make peaceful societies.

When we feel that the society will look after us, for instance in providing education and social security, we will also be happy to give something back. That is, pay tax and participate in other civic duties, making the society stronger. Through multilateralism and international cooperation we can spread social fairness and ecological responsibility, strengthening rule of law globally. We need strong and well-connected societies, with a clear vision of a shared peaceful and prosperous future for all.

Thank you!