

IPU Address Prof. Dr. Kim Putters on behalf of the delegation of the Netherlands

Dear Mrs. President, fellow parliamentarians,

The delegation of The Netherlands thanks the Ugandan parliament for organizing this 126th conference of the Interparliamentarian Union (IPU) and, in thanking our terrific host Julius Kibatsi, we thank the Ugandan people for their wonderful hospitality.

On behalf of the Dutch delegation I address you parliamentarians from all over the world with a call for securing the fundamental rights of all people to free speech and organization, to security and health, and to be who you are, man/woman and hetero/ gay/ transgender or bisexual. If we really want to bridge the gap between parliaments and people, it starts with respecting each other and securing these rights and respecting each other.

In order to do so, building democracy is essential. Democracy is not perfect and there is no one optimal definition, but its essence is clear. Democracy should be about securing all people to live freely, speak freely and to choose who governs the country. It is only stable if it is carried by the people, their governments, politicians and by societal organisations. We support building democracy, because it is all about securing the fundamental and universal rights of the people, also of minorities. Yet, this asks for our continuous awareness and efforts. Although we see democracy being strengthened around the world, we do also have major concerns about three of those fundamental and universal rights more explicitly.

Freedom of speech

First, the freedom of speech. This right is being violated frequently, as we each year sadly conclude in our IPU Committee on Human Rights and the Rights of Parliamentarians. Also in my country people do not always feel free to speak, out of fear what the reactions of extremist groups can be. We have to stand up for this right, but I can proudly say that we do have the freedom of speech. If we, parliamentarians, want to bridge the gap with the people, we have to listen to the people. If we really want to listen, and if we are profoundly interested in their concerns and opinions, the freedom of speech and of organization is essential. This means that politicians must be brave in speaking freely after having listened carefully.

Right to security and health

Secondly, the right to health and security. The health of the people is strongly linked to economic circumstances, wealth and poverty. In this respect it is shocking how HIV/Aids, malaria and tuberculoses take over the lives and hopes of so many people. Hundreds of man and women die every day - as we speak - on these diseases. They destroy families and communities. It is unacceptable that there are still governments and politicians looking away. Yet, there are positive developments as well. South Africa for example has major plans rolled out to attack HIV/Aids now. Uganda has also taken the threat seriously and we hope it will continue progressive policies on this matter.

We urge governments to overcome denial, to communicate that it is not a matter of taking a shower after having intercourse, that it is not a gay disease. The access to medication for all should be promoted for all men and women, also for sexual minorities. Leadership is necessary, not only to create work, attack poverty and establish societal responsibility, but also on health and education. It is crucial to take responsibility, to take care of each other and our communities. We strongly believe that it is our duty as parliamentarians to promote the individual responsibility for health and social behavior, and in that the common responsibility for building communities.

Equal rights for sexual minorities

Thirdly, the Netherlands address the fundamental right of all to be who they are. Without that no community can be built in a positive and sustainable way. Without that no gap between parliaments and people can be bridged. Without that society cannot be stable. Especially, therefore, we ask attention for the rights of minorities, especially sexual minorities. At this moment in several African countries bills are being prepared that criminalize them. These bills contain proposals for imprisonment and death penalties for gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people. We know that proposals are no reality yet, but we underline that these proposals are not in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It can therefore never be accepted in whatever form. As it is an attack on the freedom of speech, of organization and of the right to be who you are, we call upon you as parliamentarians to take action. We especially urge the parliaments of Uganda, Nigeria and Liberia to do so. We cannot deny anyone's freedom of speech and we can definitely not deny the right of people to be who they are and to love who they want. The Dutch delegation is a defender of the fundamental right of people to be free. We see it as our obligation and duty to stand up for this right. We therefore ask you to prevent anti homosexuality bills to become reality and practice. Build your society, don't break it. Let's not criminalize each other, let's stand together.

Parliaments, stand together against anti-homosexual legislation!

Mrs. President, to conclude. The Dutch delegation realizes that its members come from an old democracy, and that its members grew up in peace and security. We understand and do respect the differences in history and cultures of our diverse countries, but even after so many years of democracy we also know that we can never take it for granted. It requires permanent action. That is why we want to align with you. We should all use our freedom of speech to do the best of our ability to make the world somewhat better than we found her. Without the freedom of speech, without access to health and security and without respect for minorities the world will not be a better place. If WE don't stand up, together with societal organisations, who will?

Thank you Mrs. President.