



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Address by Dr Ágnes Vadai

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It gives me great pleasure to be here today. I am Dr Ágnes Vadai, MP and Chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Committee to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

I would like to first begin by extending our thanks to the Committee on Cooperative Compliance, and in particular to you Ambassador Gabrielse for reaching out to parliaments and including this important dimension in your discussions and work today.

This means a lot and we look forward to strengthening our cooperation with a view to universalisation and effective implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Convention.

Needless to say, a lot has happened since the adoption and entry into force of the Ottawa Convention more than 20 years ago. As has been pointed out here and in many other platforms and fora, it is a great achievement and should be a great source of satisfaction to see so much effort and engagement towards a world free from mines. I think it is important that we keep in mind the long road travelled so far – it reminds us all that when there is a will, ambitious objectives can be realised.

But we are not there yet and there is still some way to go and more efforts to be provided to effectively and fully implement the Convention.

The Oslo Plan of Action has placed emphasis on the need to invest further in putting together adequate national legislation and legal frameworks (article 9) and enhancing transparency (article 7). These two objectives particularly speak to me, as a member of parliament and as chair of the IPU IHL Committee.

They speak to me because we know that to achieve progress, efforts must be made nationally as well as globally. We also know that to sustain progress, we need more political commitment, coordination, buy-in from all stakeholders and solidarity.

This is where parliaments and the IPU I believe come in.

Maybe a few words first on the importance of engaging parliaments and supporting them in playing their role.

The commitments made by State parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Convention will require legal action, as well as accountability, transparency and outreach. And Parliament is the institution that brings many of these

conditions together. It is an ally in making real State Party commitments and obligations.

Legislation and legislative reform are two of the primary aspects of implementing international conventions. For such laws to be effective though, they need to be the result of an inclusive decision making process bringing all stakeholders around the table and enabling all voices to be heard.

But laws are only as good as the effort and resources put into them. For laws to be properly enforced, budgets must allocate sufficient funding in order to support implementation. Here again, parliaments have an important role to play: they hold the purse strings, and can make sure that adequate funds are available.

Laws also need to be monitored. Parliament and its committees can closely assess the impact of initiatives taken, ensure that they have the desired effect, or modify them accordingly. They should hold government to account, and ensure that the political agenda follows through commitments made. Members of Parliament can make sure that these are not forgotten.

Lastly, if conventions and laws are to be effective, they must be widely known and understood, so that they can be enforced. Therefore, legislative reform must go hand in hand with information campaigns that help to explain laws. Such campaigns involve inviting the media, civil society organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders to join in public education programmes, and to report on implementation. This is the role of parliamentarians as opinion leaders and shapers. This also contributes to transparency and accountability.

Of course, these are not easy tasks to carry out and they require capacity as well as support, such as the one provided by the IPU.

To perform their role well, parliaments must first and foremost be well informed. Over 20 years ago, the IPU began working on international humanitarian law issues because it discovered that parliaments were largely unaware of their State's international commitments. In cooperation with the ICRC, UNHCR and others, we have since worked on making MPs more aware of humanitarian and human rights law. This is a partnership we will continue to nurture and build on.

Information is crucial. It is the starting point for any action. We are convinced that our efforts will gain in strength. We will achieve that by explaining to a wider audience the real issues that are at stake, and by challenging misconceptions. The IPU has therefore consistently made use of its ability to facilitate debates, bring together politicians and decision-makers from all walks of lives and realities, to exchange, listen and learn from one another.

Awareness raising is the first step to triggering action. Combined with political peer to peer pressure and technical assistance, this can lead to real change and action. To give you an example: IPU's involvement with the Ottawa

convention is actually not new and dates back to 1997 where we initiated debates within our Assemblies around the issue of anti-personnel mines and adopted a resolution on the subject to encourage parliaments to support ratification. The debates we held then enabled to provide key information and data to decision-makers and place as a matter of priority the topic on the political agenda of many parliaments. Since, the IPU has continued and will continue to serve as a platform to mobilize parliamentary action on humanitarian priorities.

For parliaments to act, they need to have adequate internal structures. That is where the role of parliamentary committees is so critical. Through their oversight function, committees can closely follow and assess the impact of initiatives taken, ensure that they have the desired effect or modify them accordingly. This is where the IPU can also be of assistance, with the provision of support to develop or strengthen the work of such committees.

For that, skills, support and access to expertise are key. Committees need to work with the support of expert staff; and members of parliament should have access to training and capacity-building initiatives. The development of tools that members of parliament can use is also fundamental. Over the years, the IPU, ICRC, UNHCR and IFRC have collaborated on several handbooks for parliamentarians. They have covered topics including international humanitarian law, refugee protection, internally displaced persons and legislative frameworks for disaster relief. This will go a long way to support parliament's work and action.

But for parliaments to act, strong political will is also needed. This is where I believe the international community needs to scale up its efforts. It should give greater visibility to the work of parliaments and value more highly both that work and the other work of individual members. And here again, I would like to place on record our appreciation for the inclusion of parliaments in this debate. This is an initiative that needs to be replicated with others.

This leads me to my last point: partnerships.

Achieving the goals set out by the Convention, will require a collective effort and the participation of a wide range of partners. The core of the progress we make will be based on building partnerships within countries and across borders, as well as between members of parliament, representatives of government, civil society, the media, the private sector and international organizations.

I am very glad that discussions today bring different actors around the table- parliaments, civil society, governments etc. Inclusion is a sign of strength and a promise of greater impact. I therefore look forward to our discussions today.

As for the IPU, the Committee that I chair has decided to enhance its work on the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention. We hope to organise soon, with you and other partners, a series of awareness raising events to remobilise

decision-makers around this important convention and thereby bring an additional contribution to efforts for effective implementation and progress.

Thank you.