



Union Interparlementaire

Pour la démocratie. Pour tous.

IPU Representative's Speech

**Delivered at the inaugural meeting of the Parliamentary
Conference on Migration**

**Valletta, Malta
16–17 November 2017**

Hon. Speaker of the Parliament of Malta,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean,
Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean,
Distinguished parliamentarians,
Honourable guests,

On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, allow me to thank our Hosts for today's meeting, Mr. Farrugia and the Parliament of Malta, for the excellent organization of this Conference. I would also like to thank the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean for taking the decision to hold this meeting. Finally, I wish to thank the experts who have agreed to come and talk to us about the different aspects of the sensitive matter of migration, which will enable parliamentarians to invest more effectively in the management of this issue going forward.

While migration is not a new phenomenon, the current scale of the crisis and the tragedies unfolding in the Mediterranean, mean the subject has rarely been out of the news since 2015. The shocking images of human tragedy relayed by the media on a daily basis are heartbreaking in and of themselves, but allow me to share with you some alarming statistics from our Euro-Mediterranean region. According to the International Organization for Migration, 3,162 persons lost their lives in the Mediterranean in 2014, 3,499 in 2015, 4,303 in 2016 and 2,925 as of 1 November 2017.

In addition to these bleak figures, and without wishing to pre-empt the information and further technical data that will be provided by our experts, it is important to note the increased feminization of migration and the high number of unaccompanied minors involved.

From the outset, the Mediterranean has facilitated the osmosis between civilizations and peoples along its shores. But it is clear that the profound changes affecting our societies means that it is assuming another role, that of a dangerous crossing that claims human lives. Of course, it must be noted that the Mediterranean is not to blame for this turn of events; its only crime is to have found itself being used under inappropriate conditions and with insufficient means.

I stress, the fault does not lie with the Mediterranean. Conflicts, such as the one underway in Syria, sociopolitical repression and intolerance, economic needs and natural disasters, whether or not caused by climate change, are driving thousands of people on a quest for a better life.

Dear colleagues,

The situation is certainly worrying, but it is not without hope, at least not if we, the representatives of the populations bordering the Mediterranean, work alongside the Executive and international and regional stakeholders in the search for appropriate and sustainable solutions.

I am aware, as much as you are, of the sensitivity of the situation given its political, economic and social implications. As delicate and urgent as it may be, this situation is an additional challenge to those we already face, notably the pressing needs of the populations we represent. As you are acutely aware, our populations are wary of the political establishment, in part because they no longer believe that politicians are capable of handling the current migration challenges effectively.

I have also not lost sight of the implications of our commitment to managing migration, be it in terms of resources, coordination or time. However, addressing the situation in a fair, smart and humane way offers us the opportunity to consolidate democracy as well as achieving sociopolitical stability, respect for human rights, and lasting peace in our region.

To achieve this, political solutions to migration must respect basic international human rights standards and refugee law. It is also essential that these solutions respond effectively to the push and pull factors of migration, which necessitates effective consultation and cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination. The Malta Conference will focus on the migration challenges facing the whole of the Euro-Mediterranean region, on the premise that parliaments can and should play a much bigger role in ensuring that migration is managed in a fair, smart and humane way.

Parliamentarians must therefore demonstrate political leadership and show that solutions can be found. That means listening to and voicing the concerns of voters. Steps must also be taken to raise people's awareness of the realities of migration, including its advantages and disadvantages, and to propose concrete solutions to address their concerns. In so doing, parliamentarians will be seen as promoting the common interest and upholding the principles of dialogue, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I would like to propose several areas for reflection to feed your discussions on parliamentary contribution to migration management:

- a) Make migration a priority in our parliamentary programmes and develop a coherent strategy adapted to the current situation;
- b) Focus on education in order to change mentalities on and perceptions of migration. To this end, it is necessary to conduct public awareness campaigns;
- c) Ensure that the rights of migrants are reflected in our respective national legislations in keeping with relevant international standards and that these rights are fully respected in particular regarding women and minors and unaccompanied adolescents;
- d) Adapt our laws on the acceptance and integration of migrants, as well as on the return of migrants to the border, to international standards in force;
- e) Ensure that our national laws are adapted to international standards on labour and human rights and that they are applied, without exception, to all migrants;
- f) Set up an implementation mechanism to ensure that the laws thus adapted are actually applied, in particular by allocating sufficient funds and ensuring regular oversight over their implementation;
- g) Establish inter-parliamentary North-North and North-South cooperation to facilitate consultations on and the harmonisation of strategies, the exchange of good practices and to support the implementation of multilateral provisions;
- h) Establish long-term cooperation with regional and international institutions working on migration management.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

The promotion of parliamentary involvement in migration management has been a priority of IPU's action plan. In October 2015, our Organization adopted the Declaration on the imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration. The Declaration focuses on concrete measures parliamentarians can take, such as:

1. to ratify and ensure the implementation of conventions protecting the rights of migrants and refugees,
2. to ensure fairness, non-discrimination and respect for the human rights of migrants, and
3. to promote social cohesion and peaceful and inclusive societies.

The Declaration followed the launch of the handbook titled *Migration, human rights and governance* published jointly by the IPU, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organization. The handbook offers an overview of the legal framework and tools parliamentarians need to be aware of in order to help ensure the protection of the rights of migrants and the governance of international migration in compliance with the law. Copies of the handbook are available to you in the conference hall.

Apart from many other initiatives undertaken by the IPU on this subject since 2015, the Organization has taken part in numerous initiatives aimed at strengthening parliamentary engagement on migration matters. The IPU has also been closely associated with the process that resulted in the adoption in September 2016 of the United Nations Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Since April this year, the Organization has been promoting the inclusion of a parliamentary perspective in several of the six thematic debates that represent the first phase in next year's drafting of the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Next month, the IPU will participate in the evaluation meeting in Mexico where the main conclusions of the thematic sessions will be assembled and thus constitute the backbone of the first draft of the Global Compact.

IPU's new president, Senator Cuevas Barron of Mexico, is deeply committed to raising awareness on the challenges of migration and has made it a priority during her mandate. Under her presidency, the IPU and the United Nations will organise in February 2018 in New York, a United Nations-IPU parliamentary hearing on migration to be held immediately after the hearings of parties to the Global Compact. Ideally, we should be able to present the conclusions and recommendations of this Conference to these fora. I would also like to bring to your attention that tomorrow's Fourth Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Ottawa, which is organized by the IPU, will focus, in particular, on the role of young parliamentarians in migration management and the social integration of migrants.

Given its engagement in contributing to the management of this issue, I can assure you that the IPU will support all parliamentary initiatives to promote fair, smart and humane migration.

On my part, I wish you to get the most out of the discussions at this Conference and I wish it every success.

I thank you for your attention.