



**Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the
Commonwealth of Independent States**

**IPA CIS Council: International parliamentary organizations' interaction on topics
on the international agenda: ways forward**

President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Ilkka Kanerva (MP, Finland)

19 May 2016

Dear Madame Chairperson,

Honorable colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be here at the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States today. As the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and a long-standing member of the Finnish Parliament, I am an ardent believer in the force of parliamentary diplomacy and co-operation.

We parliamentarians have been elected to serve our people and to do so effectively we must create the necessary environment for successful co-operation between our nations in the interest of the greater good. This overarching objective of building bridges is the common denominator in the work of our two assemblies.

A few weeks ago the OSCE PA turned 25, marking a quarter-century of inter-parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy. But despite our efforts over the past 25 years in building bridges and laying the foundations for trust, we are living in a time characterized by tension and suspicion between east and west, with competing agendas and hostile rhetoric often replacing serious discussions between our governments for the sake of comprehensive security.

In this environment, inter-parliamentary dialogue is more necessary than ever to find solutions that truly deliver for our people. But the question must be asked: how can our work be further promoted?

Working effectively, our organizations can help foster a mutually beneficial exchange of expertise on how best to deal with global challenges. By participating in international organizations, parliamentarians

gain access to knowledge and experience beyond the scope of their domestic politics, which can inform their work at the national level.

With a number of organizations present here today, we already have a practice of exchanges during Election Observation Missions, and this openness is emblematic of the possibilities and advantages closer inter-parliamentary cooperation can bring.

The activities of parliamentary assemblies are too often ignored by the governmental sides of the organizations they serve. How shall we promote our role, what are the best practices that already exist I do hope we can discuss it today.

At the same time, despite the many strengths of our organizations in promoting democracy, inter-parliamentary assemblies need to be truly democratic institutions themselves. Their members should be elected in full compliance with democratic commitments, which will help provide transparency and accountability to governments on the national, and also on the international level. If governments take their commitments to democracy and human rights seriously at home, they can speak with greater credibility about the state of democracy and human rights abroad.

There can be no doubt that to achieve global prosperity and security all countries should co-operate on issues where they have common ground. Greater co-operation within and between our organizations is vital, and indeed there are many topics on which closer cooperation is possible – anti-terrorism and radicalization; gender issues; migration; cyber-security and economic and environmental issues.

These challenges are, by their very nature, global, and will require the kind of moral courage to overcome that can only be achieved by nations working together on areas of mutual interest.

And speaking of moral courage, I also express my firm hope that our inter-parliamentary assemblies will come to see it as their foremost duty to protect human rights, including freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, the protection of journalists and human rights defenders, and those who help safeguard and promote democracy.

Thank you for bringing us together today to discuss this important topic. I look forward with great interest to hearing what my colleagues have to say and then to a fruitful discussion.