

Samarkand Web Forum on Human Rights

12 August 2020

Opening remarks by OSCE PA President George Tsereteli

As delivered

Thank you very much for this introduction.

Dear Madam Chair Narbayeva, and our good friend Professor Saidov, who is moderating this meeting and is one of the main drivers of this event, Mr. Vice-Speaker.

I would also like to welcome the Secretary-General of the IPU, also Director Yrjola, and all the distinguished participants, Excellencies and Ambassadors.

It is my pleasure to participate in this event and I thank you for inviting me to address this important gathering.

Almost two years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Samarkand to take part in the Asian Forum on Human Rights. I would have been delighted to attend this conference in-person once again. Unfortunately, the circumstances around the globe currently make this impossible. I am glad, however, that you have found a way to bring us all together for these discussions despite this pandemic.

Even though our daily lives have been upended over the past six months, it is indeed critical that we maintain such avenues of dialogue

and that we continue to encourage regional and international co-operation on human rights issues.

As we have seen with some responses to the COVID-19 crisis, with the declaration of states of emergency in particular, it is crucial that human rights are fully upheld, and that derogation to civil liberties are limited in time, proportionate, and non-discriminatory. In this context, events such as today's are instrumental in maintaining the fight for human rights at the very top of our international and political agenda.

I find it fitting that we celebrate today International Youth Day.

The economic and social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have disrupted nearly all aspects of life for all segments of society. But young people now have to bear much greater risks when it comes to their education, their employment, their disposable income, and livelihood. In a very short period of time, this crisis has demonstrated a potential to exacerbate inequalities between generations and to alienate the youngest segment of our populations. We must remain vigilant about this.

Earlier this month, we also celebrated the 45th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, which led to the creation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This was a visionary document, which early on recognized young people as agents of change and advocates for peace.

In order to provide adequate answers to all the challenges we continue to face – armed conflicts, climate change, widespread poverty and

inequalities – we need to continue hearing fresh perspectives by actively including more youth, along with more women and more minorities, in our decision-making mechanisms.

But, to effectively gather their contributions, we need to make sure that their needs, concerns, and interests are addressed in a comprehensive manner. It is also up to the older generations to engage young people in all spheres of life and of the community.

It is true that young people are underrepresented in most national parliaments – and speakers, especially the Secretary General of the IPU, touched on this issue and some others – and as a consequence, within the OSCE PA we face a similar situation. Recognizing this, our Assembly called for greater international co-operation to build youth political dialogue, capacity-building, and the sharing of best practices.

In 2018, during the Berlin Annual Session, the OSCE PA adopted a resolution on “A shared priority: fostering peace and security through enabling young people to reach their full potential.” And among other important issues, we urged OSCE participating States to sustain youth-led international platforms with the objective of ensuring that countries are committed to a future that guarantees human dignity, freedom, justice, embraces true solidarity, and invests in ever-lasting peace.

Earlier this year, we established a network of young parliamentarians, which is meant to provide all of the OSCE PA’s tools and resources to help these young leaders reach their full potential. We highly appreciate

the great contribution of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the U.S. Congress in this project.

I hope that, in the midst of this crisis, we can further reinforce our commitment to promote meaningful youth engagement, and include youth perspectives and considerations at the heart of all our policy responses.

Before I conclude, let me congratulate all the organizers, especially our colleagues who are here at this gathering, and of course the Uzbek authorities. I recall my visit to Uzbekistan to meet with the President of the country, with Ms. Narbayeva and other leaders, and I know how they are committed to the issues of young people in the country. This is very promising, and we welcome that. Of course, it is important that you brought this project to fruition.

I look forward to the debates over the next two days, and certainly hope that the health situation will allow future such events to take place in person in the beautiful city of Samarkand in years to come.

Thank you very much.