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Human Security and Challenges for the 21st Century

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Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues, Members of Parliament, and Honourable Guests,

I will now address the topic of this panel: What is Human Security and which challenges does it pose to Parliamentarians in the beginning of this century?

Human Security may be described as a call to strengthen efforts to enable each individual human being to achieve his or her potential, and to ensure that the rights of individuals and groups are respected.

As a concept, Human Security is relatively new, but one that is now broadly used to describe the web of intertwined threats linked with genocide, civil war and the displacement of peoples.

It is important to make the distinction between human security and national security. While national security focuses on the defence of the State from outside attack, human security is about protecting individuals and communities from any form of political violence and other threats, including threats posed by the lack of access to energy and other basic resources that are essential to human life and human development.

Human security and national security should be, and frequently are, mutually reinforcing. However, states that are secure do not automatically mean their people/s are secure. The protection of citizens from foreign attack may be a necessary requirement for the security of individuals, but it is not, in and of itself, an adequate one. In the last century, far more people have been harmed and killed by their own governments than by foreign armies.

All advocates for human security concur that its primary goal is the protection of individuals. But there seems to be no consensus regarding what threats individuals should be protected from. Those who support the 'narrow' concept of human security confine themselves to violent threats to individuals, while acknowledging that such threats are

closely connected with poverty, inadequate state capacity and different types of socio-economic and political inequality.

Those who embrace a more expansive 'broad' concept of human security take the position that the threat agenda should be amplified to incorporate disease, hunger, and natural disasters as these are responsible for the deaths of far more people than genocide, war and terrorism combined.

However, if one considers that death from disease and hunger are often the result of displacement of peoples and unavailability of food in the course of armed conflicts, one can easily reconcile the two approaches to Human Security as far as conflicts threaten the life of individuals either directly, through atrocities and violence, or indirectly, namely generating the external conditions for hunger and disease. It is important to point out, therefore, that the two 'schools of thought' on Human Security are complementary rather than conflicting.

As the PGA programme of his forum clearly outlines, an essential condition for human security is represented by the Rule of Law. Only when the Rule of Law replaces the rule of force can the individual and organized groups find protection against abuse through the predictable legal framework provided by an effectively functioning and independent judiciary.

Post-conflict peace-building and crises-recovery efforts, as well as stabilization and reconstruction policies are credible, people-centered and sustainable when they are built to protect Human Security under the Rule of Law. However, the latter aspect has been too often overlooked by the international community, particularly by the institutions engaged in international cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in promoting the "human security agenda", which includes the respect of universally accepted human rights, as well as the formulation of legislation that may reinforce State institutions and functions, such as the independent judiciary and parliamentary oversight, both of which perform the necessary checks and balances against the Executive Power under the Rule of Law.

The translation of this national agenda for human security on the international plain fulfils the Vision of Parliamentarians for Global Action, namely,

"To contribute to the creation of a Rules-based International Order for a more equitable, safe, and democratic world."

And is also fully in line with its Mission Statement, in which PGA describes itself as

“A non-profit, non-partisan international network of elected legislators with over 1300 members in more than 100 countries around the globe, aims to promote peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development and population issues by informing, convening, and mobilizing parliamentarians to realize these goals.”

The Vision and Mission of PGA corresponds to the policy objective of Human Security, which should become a central cornerstone of foreign policy.

The European Parliament, in numerous resolutions and actions, promote Human Security as one of the essential values for effective multilateralism and a Rules-Based International Order, thus reflecting the vocation of the European Union, which is a community of nations sharing fundamental values and respecting common principles under the law.

The European Parliament Group of PGA, which I am delighted to Chair, can offer a unique platform for European Parliamentarians to increase the cooperation between EU institutions, PGA and the National Parliaments represented in this Forum, with the view of ensuring that we, as Parliamentarians, will be able to carry our effective follow-up actions to face the challenges of Human Security.

In this respect, I believe that PGA shall

- 1) continue to exercise leadership in promoting international justice and the fight against impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, through its well-established ICC Campaign, which receives EU support,
- 2) launch a new partnership with the EU, in particular with the European Commission, and other actors, to carry out a campaign to curb the proliferation and transfer of Conventional Weapons, which are so easily available in all corners of the world and allow any group to organize themselves into an armed faction, movement or insurrection,
- 3) engage its global membership in one of the most critical areas of human security, namely, energy security: more and more, the limited availability of ‘traditional’ energy sources and their increasingly alarming impact on global warming bring about the need to invest and develop into clean and renewable sources of energy, such as hydrogen and bio-masses.

I look forward to working with you, Dear Colleagues, to face these challenges and thus contribute to meet together the Millennium Development Goals.