Address by Jana Simanovska, Chair of the Latvian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, at the 152nd Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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In difficult times – in times of disasters and wars – humanity has always turned to philosophy, searching for answers to critical questions. And so today, I would like to turn to Thomas Hobbes.

Hobbes looked at the world as it is – stripped of illusions – and asked: what do we do about it? His answer was the social contract. People choose to surrender part of their freedom to a common authority to enforce rules that protect everyone. Not out of idealism. Out of necessity. Because in the state of nature – without rules, without systems – life is solitary, poor, nasty. It is a war of all against all.

Hobbes also noted: in the state of nature, humans are equal because all are vulnerable. The strongest can be defeated. No state can escape rising oceans, a collapsing climate, or borderless weapons. And today the challenges we face are interconnected – and they test the same question: can we govern together?

The social contract is not only between those alive today. It is a promise to those who come after us. Our children.

Within our countries, we have largely achieved a rules-based system. We live by Hobbes. But internationally, we are sliding back – back to a world that Niccolò Machiavelli would recognise – where power decides.

Some states misread Hobbes. They look at the international system, see its weaknesses, and conclude: therefore, power decides. Therefore, we return to force. We see this most clearly in Russia's war against Ukraine. Here, a permanent member of the UN Security Council – a body created to protect international order – has chosen instead to undermine it. Putin's logic is not

realism. It is a deliberate return to the state of nature – the catastrophe Hobbes warned us about, now used as a strategy.

But the answer to a weak system is not to abandon it. The answer is to strengthen it. This is precisely where our roles as parliamentarians a nd as members of this Assembly becomes essential.

This return to the state of nature harms not only people but the natural world. War poisons soil and water, destroys ecosystems, and leaves damage that will last for generations. It has led many to call this destruction ecocide – a crime against present and future life.

Parliaments have a specific responsibility here – and I speak from experience. Latvia has worked with partner parliaments to document the losses caused by Russian aggression – to establish systems that record damage and support accountability. At the IPU, we have worked on resolutions – last year and this year – that name these violations and urge responsibility. But resolutions cannot remain on paper. Their value lies in implementation – in carrying their conclusions into national law, into budgets, into political decisions. That is how we build the normative system in practice, not just in principle.

I speak here as European – and I say it also to myself. Upholding international norms cannot be selective. Requiring accountability from adversaries while excusing partners undermines the rules-based order. Consistency is not a luxury. It is the foundation of trust.

Nelson Mandela showed us that even from the darkest place – from 27 years of imprisonment – it is possible to choose a different path. He understood what Hobbes understood: that the unchecked cycle of force destroys everyone. And so he chose to build a system instead. That courage – to build rather than destroy – is exactly what this moment demands of us.

And how can we overcome global challenges – the climate crisis, wars, displacement, technological disruption – if we cannot even agree on common rules?

Therefore, this is my call to all of us as parliamentarians: we are here to build systems that work. We are here to defend them. And we are here to ensure they serve not only today's citizens, but future generations.

We should not allow those who challenge these systems to demonstrate their power. Instead, we must demonstrate that cooperation is stronger than force, and that rules, when upheld, protect us all.

Let us return to the rules-based system. Let us strengthen it. Let us build it together.

Because there is only one planet – and on this planet, we are all equal: equal in our vulnerability, and equal in our responsibility.