

**International Parliamentary Seminar on Peace, Security and Sustainable
Development - AWEPA, October 8th 2015**

Speech for Mrs. Defraigne, Speaker of the Belgian Senate

Your Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcoming words in general, for Mrs. Smet and the other speakers

I would like to welcome you to this international parliamentary seminar of the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) on Peace, Security and Sustainable Development.

I would especially like to greet Mrs. Miet Smet, Minister of State, honorary Senator, and President of AWEPA since 2009, for her tireless efforts in furthering the ideals of this Association.

This seminar provides us with a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the interaction between African and Belgian “friends of democracy”. An array of eminent and experienced personalities have graced us with their presence today . It need hardly be said that they often and very successfully, promoted sustainable development long before it became a fashionable notion on the global scene.

AWEPA’s Mission Statement

Allow me at first to quote from AWEPA’s mission statement : “AWEPA works in cooperation with African Parliaments to strengthen parliamentary democracy in Africa, to keep Africa high on the political agenda in Europe, and to facilitate African-European parliamentary dialogue”.

This is surely not an easy task but without doubt a worthwhile and indispensable one at that. Although there is still a long way to go, considerable progress has already been made towards strengthening the capacity of parliamentary democracy in Africa.

Cooperation on an equal footing

AWEPA has always set great store by the principle that European and African parliamentarians should cooperate on an equal footing, in a spirit of mutual respect. Both parties stand to gain greatly from this much valued interaction. You could call it a win-win situation not only for today's world but one that in the long run will also benefit future generations both European and African.

International awareness of significance of sustainable development (MDG → Sustainable DG)

Now more than ever, the international community realizes the value of sustainable development in addressing and eradicating violence and the root causes of terrorism.

The United Nations recently held a summit on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which will come into effect by 2016 and should be achieved by 2030. The SDG's hold a firm commitment to the furthering of sustainable development¹. Still according to the UN: "Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development".

First step in the fight against violence ensuring well-being of all citizens including women and children

In the fight against violence, it is vital to focus first and foremost on the social and economic well-being of the local populations in Africa. Political emancipation of all citizens, without exception, plays a meaningful role in achieving this goal. In this context, the rights of women and children deserve our special and undivided attention. Parliament and government should both enhance the status of women, making sure that perpetrators of violence against women get their just punishment. Women shouldn't end up in dead-end jobs, earning far less than their male counterparts and on top of that having to care for large families. They should be able to raise

¹ Draft resolution of the UN-General Assembly, 12.08.2015, A/69/L.85.

their children to be peace-loving and generous adults, the best guarantee against bitterness and strife. Besides, during a recent EU-Interparliamentary Conference on Common Foreign and Security Policy², one of our senators³, called on African countries to promote the empowerment of women.

Make younger generation aware of the values of democracy through education.

It is of the utmost importance to make the younger generations of Africa aware of the value of dialogue and peaceful compromise through education. Their youthful vigour and enthusiasm is surely a precious asset on the road towards achieving a consolidated all-inclusive democratic society. Thus there is every chance, the vicious circle of violence and conflict will be broken.

I would like to end my intervention with a poem, very dear to Nelson Mandela, which seems appropriate in this context. It might be an inspiration for us all

Ladies and gentlemen I give you "Invictus"⁴:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Now I would like to give the floor to Mrs. Miet Smet, President of AWEPA.

² Conference held in Luxembourg on 5 and 6 September 2015.

³ Mr. Steven Vanackere, Chairman of the Regional Affairs Committee of the Belgian Senate.

⁴ Invictus is a poem written in 1875 by William Ernest Henley. The title "Invictus" (Latin for "unconquered") was added by editor Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch when the poem was included in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*.