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PRESS RELEASE BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Speaker Farrugia chaired a session on the role of parliaments in ending statelessness during the 152nd IPU Assembly in Istanbul

The session, which brought together parliamentarians and experts, was organised by the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law and focused on strengthening legislative and policy responses to statelessness, which remains a global issue affecting at least 4.4 million people, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

During his opening remarks, Mr Speaker spoke of the urgent need to address what is still one of the world's most overlooked humanitarian challenges. He noted the paradox that, in a world where nearly every aspect of life is tracked and documented, millions of people still lack a legal identity and nationality.

He stressed that statelessness denies individuals access to fundamental rights, including education, healthcare, employment, property ownership and political participation. He said that this situation often arises because of shortcomings in legal frameworks, the absence of birth registration and discriminatory nationality laws. Statelessness disproportionately affects children, who represent 44% of known cases. Mr Speaker also noted that gender discrimination remains a key driver, with 24 countries still preventing women from passing their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men.

While acknowledging progress, including more than 600,000 stateless individuals acquiring citizenship since 2014 and increased accession to international conventions, Mr Speaker underlined that millions still remain without nationality. He called for renewed political will and stronger parliamentary leadership to address the issue.

Concluding his remarks, Mr Speaker reaffirmed that ending statelessness is an achievable goal. He encouraged parliamentarians to pursue legal reforms, align national legislation with international standards, and work together to ensure that every individual has the right to a nationality and a sense of belonging.

Edward Zammit Lewis MP and Robert Cutajar MP, from the Maltese delegation in Istanbul, attended the open session. During the debate, Zammit Lewis emphasised that only around half of sovereign states have ratified the 1954 Convention on Statelessness, and that this is certainly not enough. He stressed that ending statelessness is achievable but requires stronger political will and parliamentary leadership. Calling for decisive action, he urged parliaments to reform nationality laws in a clear and effective way. Zammit Lewis also emphasised the need to ensure that such laws are implemented properly in practice. He reaffirmed the important role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union as a forum in which these issues can be brought to the fore.