ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES ASGP **ASSOCIATION DES SECRETAIRES**
RAL OF **GENERAUX DES PARLEMENTS**
PARLIAMENTS

COMMUNICATION

by

Mr Dan MARZOUK
Secretary General of the Knesset

on

"Parliamentary Resilience in Times of Crisis"

Arusha Session
October 2026

Introduction

Wars, large-scale terrorist attacks, cyberattacks, earthquakes, and other extreme events do not only challenge the executive branch and the security services. Crises of this kind can, within a very short period of time, fundamentally alter the operating environment of all state institutions, including the parliament.

It is precisely in times of crisis that a parliament is called upon to play a central role: to advance urgent legislation, approve exceptional budgets, oversee the actions of the government, scrutinize the use of emergency powers, and give voice to the needs and concerns of the public. The ability of a parliament to continue functioning under exceptional circumstances is therefore not merely an organizational or operational matter. It is a prerequisite for a viable system of government and democracy.

From our experience, parliamentary resilience in times of crisis rests on three principles:

1. Continuity of operations
2. Adapting parliamentary activity to changing circumstances
3. The ability to return to normal parliamentary functioning when the conditions allow

The First Principle: Continuity of Operations

Parliamentary resilience begins with a basic institutional decision: a parliament must be able to continue functioning even under the most difficult circumstances.

This decision has clear practical implications. When a country is facing a serious crisis, the need to legislate and oversee the actions of the executive branch only increases. The executive is required to make decisions rapidly, exercise exceptional powers, and allocate substantial resources. At precisely such a time, a parliament that is unable to function may create an institutional vacuum, leaving the executive with broad powers without adequate oversight and accountability.

Continuity of operations also has public and symbolic significance. When a parliament continues to convene and carry out its work during a crisis, it conveys stability, continuity of government, and democratic resilience. In this sense, parliamentary resilience is itself part of a country's national resilience.

However, a principled decision to continue functioning is not enough. It must be translated in advance into detailed organizational and operational preparations. Every parliament should consider, during routine times, questions such as: Can the plenary chamber and committee rooms continue to operate during an emergency? Are alternative locations available for meetings? Can IT and voting systems operate from those locations? Which staff members are essential to maintaining parliamentary operations, and what arrangements are in place if some of them are unable to reach parliament? How many people can safely be present on parliamentary premises during an emergency? Is there an immediate capacity, if necessary, to hold proceedings by videoconference?

For the majority of the emergency period, the Knesset Plenum continued to meet in its regular chamber. However, on two occasions when security conditions required it, plenary sessions were moved to an alternative chamber on the Knesset grounds, adjacent to a designated protected space. On one of these occasions, the Knesset was required to approve the state budget, a process involving hundreds of electronic votes. The computerized system used to manage plenary proceedings was therefore transferred to the alternative chamber, allowing the Plenum to continuing operating fully from its new location. Committee meetings were also moved, when necessary, to protected rooms or rooms adjacent to protected spaces. At certain points, the number of people permitted to enter the Knesset was also limited, ensuring that, if necessary, everyone present could be evacuated quickly and safely to protected areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many parliaments were required to rapidly develop capacity to hold meetings by videoconference and to operate in hybrid formats. These capabilities have since proven equally relevant in security emergencies.

During a war or significant armed conflict, another possibility must also be taken into account: the parliament itself may become a target, both because of its physical importance and because of its symbolic significance as a central institution of government.

In Israel, responsibility for securing the Knesset lies with the Knesset Guard, an independent security unit under the authority of the Speaker of the Knesset. In recent years, the Knesset has expanded its capacity to address a wide range of threats, including cyber threats and various forms of physical threat.

The lesson in this regard is clear: continuity of operations depends not only on facilities, IT systems, and procedures. It also requires the ability the protect the institution itself and the people needed to keep it functioning.

The Second Principle: Adapting Parliamentary Activity

Once a parliament has ensured that it can continue functioning, another question arises: How should it operate during a crisis?

The goal is not to continue working exactly as the parliament did under normal circumstances. In extreme scenarios, parliamentary activity must be adapted to the new reality and to the limited resources available to the institution. For the Knesset, this meant moving from an approach of "maximum activity" to one of "maximum effectiveness."

During a crisis, an effective parliament is not necessarily one that holds more meetings or addresses more issues. It is one that identifies the most urgent priorities and directs its parliamentary resources toward them.

In practice, the Knesset's plenary agenda was significantly reduced. Initiatives that were not essential were postponed, and discussions focused primarily on issues

arising from the war and its impact on civilian life. Activities outside the core work of parliament, such as events, ceremonies, and group visits, were suspended.

At the same time, the center of parliamentary activity shifted to a significant degree toward the Knesset committees. The committees were almost the only forum in which government ministries, local authorities, security agencies, civil society organizations, and public representatives could sit around the same table to address the urgent challenges created by the war. The work of the committees made it possible to identify gaps and needs quickly, obtain information from the government and public bodies, and bring together officials who were not coordinating sufficiently on the ground.

The intensity of committee activity also created a major organizational and managerial challenge. The Knesset had 25 committees operating simultaneously. Without a coordination mechanism, there was a risk that different committees would address the same issues: welfare, education, health, protection, and other civilian matters, and repeatedly invite the same government officials and relevant stakeholders.

This would have resulted not only in duplication and a waste of resources, but also in a real burden for government ministries and authorities that were themselves required to manage the crisis.

To address this, a dedicated mechanism was established to coordinate the work of the committees. Every request for a committee meeting was professionally assessed: Had the issue already been discussed? Was another committee expected to address it? Was there duplication among the invited participants? And would it be more appropriate to hold a joint meeting of two or more committees?

Measures of this kind naturally raise procedural and democratic questions. The Knesset temporarily curtailed the use of some parliamentary tools, and the need for closer coordination among committees affected, to some extent, the discretion of committee chairs in setting their agendas.

Criticism of such measures is legitimate and indeed essential. With that in mind, a severe crisis may require temporary adjustments to established working methods to ensure that parliament can perform its role as effectively as possible. The challenge is making the necessary adjustments without allowing them to become the permanent way in which parliament operates.

The Third Principle: A Return to Parliamentary Normalcy

One of the most important tests of parliamentary resilience is not only the ability to activate emergency mechanisms, but also the ability to know when to stop using them.

Measures introduced during a crisis can sometimes remain in place even after the original need for them has diminished. This may result from a sense of security, organizational convenience, or simply the gradual adaptation of institutions to new ways of working.

For this reason, it is important to establish a clear principle from the outset: any departure from normal parliamentary procedure should be temporary, proportionate, and limited in time.

At the Knesset, the adjustments introduced during the emergency period were reviewed on an ongoing basis, with the aim of returning to normal working practices as soon as circumstances allowed. Parliamentary tools and regular activities were gradually restored in line with the evolving security situation.

After approximately three months, the Knesset returned to full parliamentary operations, even though the war itself was still ongoing.

This demonstrates that parliamentary resilience is measured not only by a parliament's ability to continue functioning during a crisis, nor solely by its ability to adapt quickly

to changing circumstances. It is also measured by the institutional discipline required to reinstate parliamentary rules and procedure, checks and balances, and normal working practices when conditions permit.

A strong parliament is not only one that knows how to activate emergency mechanisms. It is also one that knows how to return to normalcy at the right time.

Conclusion

Parliamentary resilience is not simply a matter of procedures, infrastructure, or emergency plans. It reflects the ability of the country's most important democratic institution to continue functioning amid instability, adapt its work to new needs without losing sights of its institutional role, and return to normal working practices when conditions allow.

The Israeli experience does not offer a single model that can be applied to every parliament. Constitutional structures, security environments, parliamentary cultures, and the challenges facing each country are different. Nevertheless, it seems that every parliament can, and should, ask itself three basic questions:

Can we continue to function if the reality around us changes overnight?
Are we prepared to adapt our parliamentary activity to the realities of a crisis?
And do we have the mechanisms in place to ensure a return to normal parliamentary functioning when conditions allow?

No parliament is immune to crisis. But every parliament can choose whether to wait for the next crisis to reveal its vulnerabilities, or to prepare for it in advance.