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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Webinar for the Asia-Pacific Region Parliaments
Putting the wellbeing of people and the planet at the centre of COVID-19 recovery strategies: The critical role of parliaments

Geneva, 10 March 2022

Madam Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this webinar, which will focus on the wellbeing of people and the planet as we forge ahead with strategies to recover from COVID-19. I would have wished to be there live but, unfortunately, I am travelling at the time of the event. Let me start by warmly thanking the Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, and her office for the fruitful collaboration that we have built on the SDGs front. This event, the third of its kind, is part of a series of IPU regional webinars on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a time of pandemic and is also being organized in anticipation of the 9th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the intergovernmental meeting convened by UNESCAP to review progress on the SDGs at the regional level.

Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are at a critical juncture in human history. Together with a climate crisis and a recession on a scale not seen in nearly a century, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed some of the great progress made in human development. Inequalities between and within countries have come to the forefront in health systems, social protection, access to education, and many other areas. To overcome this situation, we only have two options: we can try to temporarily address these multiple overlapping crises until the next will come, or we can implement a coherent and comprehensive plan to solve this global health emergency and eradicate systemic problems that are impeding our societies from being sustainable, inclusive and resilient, at their root. I guess all of us would opt for the second option.

It is not going to be an easy task, but we have a precious roadmap in our pocket: the SDGs. Thanks to their interlinked nature, they can help us improve our preparedness to respond to the pandemic and implement recovery plans that consider the positive and negative interactions between the Goals and their targets. The implementation of development plans can in fact be frequently hindered by trade-offs between different priorities, like for example economic growth and human wellbeing or environmental protection. Integrating the SDGs approach is extremely necessary to ensure a greater policy coherence and avoid promoting actions that can boost progress in one area but, at the same time, be detrimental to the improvement of other sectors.

Parliaments must play a key role in the SDGs implementation process. Many are the actions they can undertake to contribute to the sustainable development of their country, ensure that policies, strategies and national development plans adequately reflect local needs and duly take into account the concerns of marginalized and vulnerable segments of the society.

Parliaments can and must help shape a sound legal framework, scrutinize whether policies and laws fulfill their purpose, monitor government's work, by using their powers to challenge and question about its efforts to deliver across the wide range of goals while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Each region, each country has different SDG priority goals and targets depending on its specific context. According to available data provided by UNESCAP, climate change and disaster risks should be urgently addressed in the Asia-Pacific region. In their role as legislators, scrutinizers of the government, representatives and budget allocators, parliamentarians should make sure that these serious problems are adequately tackled through national development plans and related funds.

Disaggregated data is extremely important to carefully monitor the implementation of the SDGs but its availability remain limited. Parliaments should regularly request data from the national statistical office and help ensure that they are adequately funded. For a constructive and effective oversight process, parliamentarians should consult with citizens and keep track of the commitments made by the government also through international monitoring processes like the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development where countries voluntarily submit SDG progress reports.

These and other relevant topics will be discussed during today's webinar. It is my hope that you will use this platform to benefit from the expertise of invited speakers, share your views with other peers and discuss tangible ways to ensure that the wellbeing of people and the planet is put at the centre of COVID-19 recovery strategies in a concrete way. I wish you a very successful meeting.