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# Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

51st session of the Human Rights Council

Geneva, 15 September 2022

Dear President of the UN Human Rights Council,  
Dear Deputy-High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be with you today and to share with you a parliamentary perspective on the role of parliaments in helping bring about the full implementation of the right to development.

Needless to say, we subscribe to the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development that asserts that the human person – individually and above all, collectively – is at the heart of all activity, not only in economic but also in social, political and cultural terms. Any serious development process should therefore be based on people's active, free and meaningful participation.

Built on this assumption, we understood very early that, through their constitutional prerogatives, parliaments could contribute substantially to the fulfilment of the right to development. They can do so in particular by leveraging human rights to support implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and its overall aim to 'leave no one behind.'

We now have less than 8 years left until 2030: it is time to revitalize our efforts to make the right to development a reality in all parts of the world, and I can see no better way to achieve this than to redouble our efforts to implement economic, social, cultural and other rights that are relevant to sustainable development. In order to succeed, I argue that two things will be critical: first, we need to ensure that all our development efforts are in line with human rights principles, and second, to make use of the countless synergies that exist between human rights and the SDGs.

Parliaments can and should play a crucial role in that regard. As the *vox populi* of a country, Parliaments have legislative, budgetary and oversight powers that are indispensable for the implementation of human rights recommendations. I will mention just one example: in Paraguay, MPs have been participating in State delegations to United Nations human rights bodies, which allowed them to make substantive contributions to the debate and follow-up to commitments upon their return. A few years ago, a public database tracking the implementation of human rights recommendations and SDG commitments was set up with the active involvement of Parliament: this good practice is spreading to other countries, and MPs are often in the driver's seat. In Rwanda, with IPU's support, the Parliament discussed existing legislation on sexual and reproductive rights with a view to improving access to health services for adolescents. The focus on adolescents' rights was considered instrumental to break a cycle of school dropouts, unemployment and poverty. Legislative proposals are currently being developed to ensure compliance with

international human rights instruments so that young people can thrive and drive the country's development and prosperity.

Clearly, much more needs to be done: on the one hand, MPs need to be aware of human rights mechanisms and their recommendations; on the other, it is important that UN human rights bodies engage more robustly with parliaments. The IPU has a long and fruitful history of cooperation with the CEDAW Committee, which adopted a statement in that regard a few years ago: since then, the involvement of parliaments has been increasing steadily. The IPU and the CRC Committee are also following this model. The IPU is now working more closely with the Human Rights Council and several treaty bodies to replicate this model: I am sure that the new Memorandum of Understanding we signed with the High-Commissioner last year will lend a new impetus to this collaboration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is important that we act quickly, the latest developments show that we have no time to lose whether we are talking of the right to a safe and clean environment, the right to food or the right to health, manifold crises all affect and challenge us all, especially the most vulnerable among us. We have seen it with COVID-19: investments in healthcare are critical for resilience to pandemics. We also know that these investments tend to more than pay for themselves – in the form of reduced illness and death and greater attendance at school and at work: I recall a famous malaria study that has shown that a child who grew up malaria-free will earn 50 percent more per year for their entire adult life. However, guidance from treaty bodies shows that these investments need to be free from any discrimination and made accessible to all, including people living far from economic centres.

Parliaments can and must ensure equity in access. This is an example of how the right to development offers us practical guidance to ensure that no one is left behind, and the IPU will continue to assist Parliaments on this path in partnership with OHCHR and the UN human rights mechanisms.

In this way, we can contribute effectively to build back better. That is our best chance to deliver on our commitments under Agenda 2030. We have no time to waste; let us work closer together to redouble our efforts to make the right to development a reality for all.

As we celebrate today, the International Day of Democracy, we need to be more resolved to make democracy and its institutions to effectively deliver for peoples' well-being, through full realization of the right to development.

Thank you for your kind attention