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## Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

UDHR75 Parliamentary Roundtable - parliaments and women's rights

Geneva, 22 June 2023

Mr. High Commissioner (Mr. Volker Türk),  
Madam President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians (Ms. Cynthia Lopez Castro),  
Distinguished member of the CEDAW Committee (Ms. Nicole Ameline),  
Dear members of parliament and guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the House of Parliaments!

I am pleased to open today's roundtable together with you, Mr. Türk, and the IPU focal point in the CEDAW Committee, Ms. Ameline. It is a great pleasure to have with us Ms. Cynthia Lopez Castro, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians.

The IPU and the Office of the High Commissioner enjoy a longstanding cooperation. We share the belief that without parliaments we cannot drive the change that we want to see in the world. So, it has been a natural move for us to pool our efforts with the Office to mark this year's 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To mark this partnership, it is no coincidence that we focus specifically on women's rights.

We are here to reaffirm that Women's Rights are Human Rights. Despite progress in institutionalizing women's rights worldwide, we are now experiencing a rollback on many fronts – in discourses, in acts and even in laws that are supposed to recognize and guarantee these rights.

Dear participants,

Needless to say, gender equality and respect for women's rights are at the core of the mission of the IPU. There can be no genuine democracy, no sustainable development or peace, no social justice and more generally no means for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, if we are not serious about achieving gender equality across the board.

Reaching our 2030 targets on time will require transformative action. Transformative action for gender equality in particular is vital. We cannot meet the SDG targets if we leave half of the population behind. So, we need to solidify existing gains toward these goals and be much more ambitious in our actions so that we can have lasting results. Revitalising the promise of UDHR, and the many treaties that guarantee the rights it contains, is one key element in this endeavour.

For over 20 years, the IPU has engaged parliaments on international human rights instruments. This engagement has focused in particular on the CEDAW Convention. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the CEDAW Committee was the first treaty body to adopt a comprehensive approach on the role of parliaments. This is due to a shared belief between the IPU and the CEDAW Committee that no real progress can be made in fulfilling the rights enshrined in the Convention if parliaments are not on board. So, I am most glad that today, together with you all, we will be launching the second edition of the handbook for parliamentarians on the CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol, which we have produced in partnership with OHCHR.

We hope you will all bring this handbook home to support you in tackling the multiple challenges in achieving gender equality. Far too many countries still have laws that do not grant women the same

rights as men on matters related to the family or nationality. One in three women worldwide still face domestic or sexual violence in their lifetime. And just over 26% of members of parliament globally are women, well behind our gender parity target.

Transformative change must start at home – so firm parliamentary action on gender equality must start with transformation from within. Parliament should mirror society in all its diversity so it can live up to the expectations and needs of everyone – meaning people of all genders, all age groups, all social backgrounds and origins, whether they live in urban or rural areas, with or without disabilities – to name but a few.

Dear participants,

Ensuring women's rights is not only a question of equality and fairness, but also a path towards a more sustainable future for everyone. It is also a path towards a future where human rights are complemented and strengthened vis-à-vis technological advances and risks deriving from climate change.

It is for these reasons that today's roundtable is so important. It presents an opportunity to focus on the role of parliaments and parliamentary cooperation, in creating new momentum for Human Rights, on placing women's rights high on the national and international agendas.

Each and every member of parliament is important. We very much count on your contributions and your individual commitment. This meeting will allow you to devise a promising pledging document to inform a parliamentary roadmap for Human Rights and advocate the centrality of parliaments and women's rights ahead of the Human Rights 75 High-Level Event in December this year.

I am sure today's session will make your work and IPU's work on human rights and gender equality ever more relevant and effective.

Once again, welcome to the House of Parliaments and I look forward to the outcome of today's deliberations!