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For democracy. For everyone.

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Concept note for the General Debate on the theme:

Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 are the world's best policy prescription to combat poverty, achieve social justice, create conditions for peace, preserve nature and promote human wellbeing.

SDG 16 on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions is a key enabler of the entire SDG framework. This goal recognizes that underlying the multiple crises of our time is a fundamental *governance* challenge linked to people's trust in institutions of government and their capacity to meet the needs of all people equitably and sustainably.

Indeed, around the world, the social contract that binds people to each other and to their institutions of government is at risk. With specific targets on the rule of law, representative, effective and accountable institutions, fundamental freedoms, corruption, access to information, displacement, violence and criminality among others, SDG 16 shines a light on the "gray matter" that keeps societies together and governments running.

More than any other SDG, Goal 16 underscores the need for an effective public administration and for institutions of government – from ministries to parliaments, the courts, local councils, public utilities and others – that work for all people, leaving no one behind. Effective, accountable and representative institutions are needed to incentivize people's civic engagement at all levels, including through the ballot box, to support public services such as health care, education and environmental protection, to curb tax evasion and corruption, and to reduce those tensions in society that are often the root cause of violence, particularly against women.

As stated in the May 2023 report of the United Nations Secretary-General, progress toward SDG 16 is proceeding too slowly and with none of the targets on track for the implementation deadline of 2030. The same report notes that: *"ongoing and new violent conflicts around the world are derailing the global path to peace and achievement of Goal 16...Citizens also face challenges accessing justice, basic services/legal guarantees and are generally underrepresented due to ineffective institutions. Moreover, structural injustices, inequalities and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies further out of reach."*

The IPU was a strong advocate for a governance goal to be included in the SDGs. Today, the key elements of SDG 16 lie at the heart of the IPU's new strategy (2022- 2026). In particular, the IPU is working to improve the representation of women, youth and minorities in parliaments and to help build resilient and innovative institutions. Together with partner organizations, it has also developed indicators for democratic parliaments, a new tool to help parliaments to measure their capacity and performance, as well as to identify priorities for further development. The indicators are a major step towards a shared vision for effective, accountable and transparent parliaments as well as responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making in parliaments.

The debate will provide an opportunity for the IPU Members and other participating delegations to take stock of SDG 16 and reflect more broadly on the dissatisfaction that large majorities around the world feel with regard to their security, public services, and institutions of government – particularly parliament.

Delegations are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- How can the bond of trust between people and their public institutions be strengthened?
- How can institutions be made more effective, including through capacity building and broad-based representation?
- How can the rule of law be upheld consistently and fundamental freedoms be protected?
- How can violence be prevented to maintain social peace as a condition of good governance?

The main messages of the debate will be reflected in a final statement to be adopted on the last day of the Assembly.