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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

**Delivered at the *African Regional Parliamentary Conference:
Comprehensive Responses to Refugee Situations – Effective
Parliamentary Approaches***

Pan African Parliament Headquarters
Midrand, 13 November 2019

It is a pleasure for me to join you today for the closing of this regional conference focusing on Comprehensive Responses to Refugee Situations. While I was unfortunately unable to attend from the very beginning, it was important for me to be here, even shortly, in view of the importance of the subject you have been addressing over the past three days.

From the outset – allow me to thank our hosts – the Pan African Parliament, for generously welcoming us here in Midrand, and our partner, UNHCR for the invaluable support and contributions throughout these past days, and years.

I am also pleased to see so many parliaments represented here – this is testimony to the importance of the issue discussed. We all know how touched the African continent is by forced displacements, which are cause to great human tragedy; we also know the traditional and precious African hospitality and solidarity which we need to preserve and support.

Your presence here today also confirms that parliaments remain key actors when it comes to addressing issues and situations related to human rights, human dignity, peace and development. Solutions will only be found and lead to concrete results if parliaments are engaged.

The question of refugees, their protection and rights, are very much at the heart of the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and have been so for many years now. And it is not surprising as I believe they call on Parliaments fundamental role which is to represent and defend the rights of all women and men, girls and boys, and work towards the peaceful and sustainable development of societies.

You all emphasized that we must keep in mind the human face of displacement – these are men and women, that are forced to flee and leave their lives behind. Parliaments have a duty to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

We know that addressing the plight of refugees and providing support to host communities need to go hand in hand. Any response has to be comprehensive, addressing both these two dimensions; and bringing in on board all stakeholders, including refugees, and allowing both for refugees and host communities to thrive and develop.

These are certainly not simple matters and as many of you have mentioned in these past days, the answer must go beyond the already challenging task of dealing with

refugee situations and emergencies. For sustainability purposes, responses must also address root causes of displacement. This means looking at conflict resolution, peace building and reconciliation; it means looking at governance issues; it means tackling issues related to inequality, security and climate change, which all can lead to displacement. Thus again the importance of parliamentary engagement and commitment.

As we are closing these three days, I would like to say a few words about next steps.

The Global Refugee Compact which was affirmed in December 2018 is an ambitious programme of action to address refugee situations in an efficient way. As you have heard it provides for a balanced approach, clearly making the link between refugee protection and the development of host communities. It highlights the importance of empowering refugees to become self-reliant and make a positive contribution to their host communities. It also provides for avenues for more equitable burden sharing and sustainable solutions.

The Global refugee forum which will be held in December in 2019 in Geneva is the first opportunity for States to come and share both the progress they have achieved in meeting some of the objectives of the GCR. It will also be an opportunity for countries to make concrete pledges towards the implementation of the GCR. These pledges can be financial, technical or policy related. While the results of your conference today will be shared at the GRF by the IPU and the PAP, it is key that your respective parliaments prepare as well for the forum by questioning government on the pledges made (or not), debating them and already planning for their implementation. That debate and parliamentary involvement from the very beginning is key efficient implementation.

The GRF and country pledges are a first milestone; implementation of pledges will be the next step. I know you have extensively discussed this during these past days – this will require legislative reform, budgetary allocations, oversight of the executive and awareness raising and sensitization of populations.

I will therefore not go into this but wanted to add the issue and importance of building capacity and having the necessary tools to play your role efficiently. It would be important to look into how these issues will be addressed in your Parliaments, by what structures and mechanisms. Do you have the adequate bodies in place? Do you have sufficient resources? Capacities? Support?

Developing a parliamentary action plan to accompany the implementation of the pledges would also allow you to map out key actions required and identify capacity needs to perform your tasks efficiently.

I would also like to encourage the holding of meetings such as this one and the development of platforms, including virtual ones, for exchange of best practices. We know that the experience is there. Platforms where you are able to share, listen and learn from one another are invaluable and contribute to more effective action. These can be between parliaments; these can also be inclusive of other stakeholders, such as civil society.

Access to information and expertise will also be key, and I encourage you, though I believe this is already the case in many countries, to reach out to UNHCR offices and seek their support in carrying out your work in support of refugee responses.

The IPU for its part will remain engaged through its Committee to Promote respect for international humanitarian law, which is very well represented here, as well as through its various programmes of work. We are at your disposal to accompany you and support you in your endeavours.

At our last Assembly which concluded a month ago in Belgrade, the organization adopted two sets of pledges to support the implementation of the Global refugee compact and the *IBelong* campaign to end statelessness. In these respective pledges, we commit to continuing to mobilise political engagement of MPs on refugee and statelessness issues and offer platforms of debates at our assemblies and other meetings, for awareness raising purposes. We also commit to collecting examples of good parliamentary practices to support further action, and we hope to do this as well in Africa with the Pan-African Parliament, in follow up to this conference. We also commit to support parliaments in implementing change at the national level, and engage women and young MPs in particular, as key stakeholders.

The task is big and will require political will and engagement. It will require speaking out for those that have no voice, engaging with communities, listening and taking brave action. It will also require building partnerships and working together across parties, across countries, with national, regional and international actors.

I therefore look forward to the adoption of the outcome of this conference. I hope that as a first step you will disseminate and discuss it in your parliaments and that this will allow you to start or reinforce parliamentary engagement on refugee protection issues.

We look to working together with you in making a change in favor of those that have left everything behind but that we certainly should not leave behind.