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Speech by IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong

Webinar for parliaments in Africa

*The impact of COVID-19 on SDG
implementation in Africa:
What role for
Parliaments?*

Geneva, 13 November 2020

Madam UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa,
Honorable Speakers of Parliament,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this webinar on “The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Africa: What role for Parliaments?”. Let me start by warmly thanking Madam UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Ms. Vera Songwe, along with her team. We are very pleased to organize this regional webinar in collaboration with such a valuable partner as UN ECA and look forward to strengthening this partnership further.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current global health crisis has been an unprecedented wake-up call that is showing us how crucial it is for countries to have policy and legislation ensuring preparedness and prevention. The moderator has referred to some of the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are uncovering stark asymmetries and structural imbalances in our societies, such as the prevalence of poverty, unequal access to health services, global cooperation, and persistent inequalities of income as well as of access to public goods and fundamental human rights. The latest data shows that the pandemic has been hampering the realization of the SDGs, pushing critical development targets beyond reach and hitting the most

vulnerable and marginalized segments of the populations the hardest, not only in terms of vulnerability to the virus but also from the economic point of view.

To contain the spread of the pandemic, alleviate its effects and ensure that no major crisis will follow at the economic, social and environmental levels, it is crucial that countries implement well-directed and well-resourced responses that are inclusive, forward-looking, and aligned with the SDGs. The impact of COVID-19 will unfortunately be long-lasting. That is why structural responses based on the SDGs framework are badly needed. In the IPU's view, the global goals are more relevant today than ever before. The world is faced with a number of challenges that can only be solved through common, global solutions that the SDG framework readily offers. The SDGs provide a road map that can help countries improve their preparedness, respond to the pandemic, and implement recovery plans that deliver social and environmental sustainability. Their strength also lies in their recognition that the issues affecting sustainable development are interrelated and should therefore be considered in a holistic way.

Parliaments must play central role in this effort. Their legislative, oversight and budget responsibilities make them key players in, for example, improving the health coverage of the people they represent, combating inequalities, and building peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

I would like to emphasize the critical role that parliaments and parliamentarians have in holding governments accountable for how resources, including aid, are spent. Achieving the SDGs will require an increase in the quantity and quality of resources available, effective spending, as well as stronger development partnerships. To strengthen the role of parliaments in this area, the IPU and UNDP have recently published a set of guidelines for enhancing engagement and contribution of parliaments to effective development cooperation. These guidelines provide an overview of the main elements of effective development cooperation and identify concrete ways in which parliamentarians can ensure resources and partnerships are used in the most effective way possible.

Another way in which parliaments can exercise their oversight function with regard to the SDGs is through participation in the Voluntary National Reviews, whose findings countries present to the United Nations. The survey the IPU conducted this year indicates that some 58% of parliaments from the countries presenting the reports

engaged and contributed in some way to the process. This represents a significant improvement from the 2019 finding of 38%. We at the IPU hope that this figure will continue to grow, and that this involvement of parliaments will result in improved oversight and better outcomes for the people. I use this opportunity to call parliaments to action in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As countries are now resetting their priorities and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic, parliaments should be in a position to influence policies and budgets to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic responses and recovery strategies incorporate the SDG framework in its entirety. Parliaments should monitor policy implementation and ensure that the needs and concerns of the whole of society are given due consideration, with no one left behind. Parliaments should be at the heart of the national and global response to COVID-19, and they should also be at the heart of transformational change. Going back to business as usual cannot be an option.

During this webinar you will acquire up-to-date information on the status of SDG implementation, as well as recommendations to accelerate transformative change in Africa. You will have a unique opportunity to exchange views, share experiences and identify common strategies to integrate the SDGs in the work of your parliaments, and to scale up the resources for and political commitment to regional cooperation.

It is my hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to come up with recommendations and conclusions that will be beneficial to your parliaments and the region as a whole. I look forward to open and constructive debates and wish you a very successful webinar.