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## Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

### (c) **Technical briefing on *The role of Parliamentarians in achieving universal health coverage and global health security as two sides of the same coin***

**Geneva, 25 May 2018**

The IPU and WHO jointly organized a technical briefing on *The role of Parliamentarians in achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and global health security as two sides of the same coin*. The briefing event took place in Geneva (Switzerland) on 25 May 2018 during the 71<sup>st</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA). It was the third consecutive parliamentary event to be held at the WHA in recognition of the role and contribution of parliaments and parliamentarians in promoting health and well-being at national and global levels.

The meeting was attended by over 200 participants who filled the meeting room to its capacity. The participants included members of parliaments, representatives of civil society, scientists, and senior officials of WHO and other UN agencies. They discussed the imperatives of UHC and global health security in achieving full coverage of essential health services globally and establishing health systems capable of dealing with threats from infectious diseases and other public health crises. In addition to ensuring that healthcare does not contribute to the burden of poverty, emphasis was placed on equity and quality of access for even the most marginalized and vulnerable groups of our societies, including women, children, adolescents, migrants and the elderly.

In his introductory remarks, the IPU Secretary General emphasized the importance of the IPU-WHO partnership, now spanning over 10 years, and over which period the issues of global health and well-being had received increasing attention on the IPU's agenda. He pointed to the role of parliaments in creating an enabling environment for health-related policy work as a critical precondition for ensuring universal access to health.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, in undertaking to regularize collaboration on future events at both the World Health and IPU Assemblies, emphasized that parliaments were critical for translating international commitments into national programmes and holding governments accountable. That had particular relevance for UHC and global health security as political rather than economic choices, underlying the necessity for further cooperation between the IPU and WHO.

In commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alma-Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care (PHC), and in recognition of PHC as a key component of UHC, WHO will be convening a Global Conference in Astana, Kazakhstan in October 2018. The need for representation of parliamentarians at the Astana meeting was emphasized.

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The discussion was enriched by a diverse range of contributions from the panellists including Dr. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and Chair of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH); Dr. Habibe Millat, MP, Bangladesh, and Ms. Petra Bayr, MP, Austria, respectively Chair and Vice-Chair of the IPU Advisory Group on Health; Dr. Serik Bekturganov, Senator, Kazakhstan; and Dr. Oscar Mukasa, MP, Tanzania.

There was general agreement about UHC as an approach to assert the mutually reinforcing relationship between developmental challenges and access to healthcare. In Bangladesh, for example, over 60 per cent of healthcare was funded privately through out-of-pocket expenses by patients despite the prevalence of low incomes and socio-economic inequalities. In addition to economic factors, careful attention needed to be paid to addressing legislative and implementation gaps that excluded marginalized and vulnerable groups, which remained a challenge even in Austria where a national health insurance scheme was in place.

Global health security which as a principle tended to be less understood than UHC, related to the preparedness at national and global levels to prevent and respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases and other major public health emergencies. The experience from Tanzania illustrated that, despite the fact that the country itself had not faced any actual outbreaks related to the Ebola virus disease, incidents in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo necessitated a technical and financial readiness to deal with potential cross border threats.

There was general acknowledgement in the meeting of the need for strong parliamentary action to ensure effective and appropriate legislation, oversight of all levels of government, and budgets to advance health programmes and interventions. Parliamentarians also commended the IPU and WHO for the organization of the Parliamentary Meeting and requested that the event be institutionalized at future WHAs.