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146th IPU Assembly Manama (11–15 March 2023)

Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

IPU–WHO side event at the 146th IPU Assembly, “*Leveraging the role of parliamentarians to progress towards UHC*”

Manama, 13 March 2023

It is an honour to welcome you to this important side event on *Leveraging the role of Parliamentarians to progress towards Universal Health Coverage*. The meeting today will discuss what parliamentarians can do for people when they are most vulnerable, for their health. The topics under discussion today are close to my heart. I am pleased that we organized this event with our long-term partner, the World Health Organization.

Universal health coverage is key to ensuring that all people have access to the health services they need on an equal footing and without suffering financial hardship. In October 2019 the IPU adopted a resolution *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health*, that underscores the unique contribution parliaments can make towards achieving universal health coverage. By using their powers to legislate, adopt budgets and determine spending priorities, Parliaments can hold the government to account and to conduct advocacy and awareness-raising. Overall, this resolution provides a road map for parliaments to move towards UHC. It highlights the importance of primary health care and people-centred health systems, with a strong focus on women, children and adolescent health, including sexual and reproductive health, as a key component of UHC. It also emphasizes the role that strong health systems and services play in ensuring global health security.

The IPU stands ready to provide support to national parliaments to build the necessary capacities to move towards UHC. To this end, the IPU and the World Health Organization have produced a handbook on universal health coverage that is intended to help parliaments fulfil their roles as enablers of UHC. This handbook will be officially launched at this Assembly.

As custodians of public wellbeing, parliaments and parliamentarians are well-placed to champion UHC not just in their own contexts but on the international stage as well. The IPU was proud to support a workshop last year in Benin that enabled parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the existing legal framework supporting UHC in the country. Following that workshop a new law was adopted in October 2022, and it introduced a mandatory employer health insurance, both in the private and public sector.

I hope that this side event will be useful for all of you. Political will at the highest level is vital to build a solid enabling environment to prioritize the needs and rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized. The IPU will continue supporting national parliaments to strengthen their health systems for all, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Let me end here by wishing you all a great start to this side event on UHC that the IPU has been pleased to organize in conjunction with the WHO. I look forward to open and constructive debates and wish you a very successful meeting.

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