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Ninth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

The role of youth in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs through digital transformation and innovation

Hanoi, Viet Nam, 14 – 17 September 2023

Conference Statement

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We, almost 300 young parliamentarians, came together at the Ninth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians on 14 – 17 September 2023 in Hanoi, Viet Nam to affirm our commitment to accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, especially through digital transformation and innovation. Our average age was 38.4 years and approximately 44% of us were women MPs, along with representatives from global and regional organizations, youth groups, start-ups, academia, and influential leaders of the IPU and Viet Nam. We are delighted that the Conference coincided with the United Nations' International Day for Democracy on 15 September.

Our meeting in Viet Nam marked the eighth anniversary of the Hanoi Declaration on the SDGs, adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2015 and setting out the commitment of parliamentarians to address global development priorities. As we pass the midway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), we are at a momentous and critical juncture.

We emphasize and share great concern regarding the fact that, with less than seven years remaining to achieve the SDGs, only 12% of SDG targets are being well implemented, while we are still behind on 50% of the targets, with levels ranging from moderately to severely off track. These results warrant not only our reflection, but resolute action, especially drawing attention to gaps in achieving the goals related to education, gender equality, decent work, economic growth, climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions, which are of vital concern to youth. 258 million young people are still out of school, when we need universal education that leaves no one behind. The number of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is increasing considerably, rising to 23.3%. Young women remain worse off than young men, being roughly two-thirds as likely to be employed. We are also nowhere near equity when it comes to representation of women and young people in politics. Less than 27% of MPs around the world are women, and only 2.8% of MPs are 30 years of age or under. We need to work faster, more creatively, and with a far greater sense of urgency, to achieve the agenda on which we all agreed.

Our world is characterized by the rapid growth of technology, digital transformation and innovation. We need to harness their potential to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, especially for issues important to youth. For example, in education, digital tools can open up educational and training opportunities to more young people through online means. By unleashing innovation, we can help scale up start-ups led by young people that in turn can employ more young men and women. When these are enterprises that help adapt to or mitigate climate change, investing in youth for the clean jobs of tomorrow can have multiplier positive effects.

The opportunities are clear, and they must be available to everyone, yet significant gender gaps persist. The fact that women are 26% less likely to own a mobile phone than men is

unreasonable. Digital transformation and innovation must be opportunities that bolster gender equality by facilitating new avenues for empowerment.

As key inventors, users and promoters of technological evolution, young people are uniquely positioned to lead in the positioning of digital transformation and innovation at the centre of action to accelerate progress in making development sustainable for the planet and accessible for the people, leaving no one behind. Young people are already leaders in the private sector, as CEOs of tech companies and innovative startups, or, as investors in digital transformation. This should also be mirrored with young people leading in our political institutions.

We, young MPs, know how to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape, and we know best the pulse of our country's youth and future generations. It is our role to give voice to their aspirations. Young people are natives of the latest technologies and are well positioned to drive new solutions for the good of all. This includes through start-ups, developing new technologies and harnessing the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We reiterate our call for MPs and political leaders to take transformative action for more youth in politics by joining the IPU Campaign / *Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!*

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the strategic importance of digital tools in our parliaments. These can contribute to more inclusive legislative, monitoring and decision-making processes on important issues, making them more comprehensive, with greater transparency and increased public participation. Real-time engagement channels can enable immediate interaction between constituents and representatives. By facilitating participation, digital transformation can empower citizens, particularly youth, to actively engage in the political process and contribute to shaping policy decisions. For parliamentarians, these digital tools offer greater opportunities for combining their work and private life, especially for those with caring responsibilities. We welcome the IPU self-assessment toolkit on the SDGs as an innovative approach to helping parliaments integrate the SDGs into parliamentary work according to the specificities of each parliament and contributing to the effective implementation of the SDGs in a more coherent and sustainable manner.

Science and technology are cornerstones for advancing peace and sustainable development and providing solutions to today's complex challenges. They enable evidence-based and informed policymaking, whether on environmental protection, development or conflict resolution. Science and the common search for knowledge and solutions can unite in collective cause, providing a neutral platform for cooperation and an incentive for peaceful coexistence. We, young MPs, can play an important role in helping foster the next generation of tech-savvy and problem-solving youth to help realize sustainable development and peace.

When harnessing the power of technology and innovation in a transforming world, we must work to maximize the positive outcomes that these bring, while mitigating unwanted risks. This includes taking an ethical and prudent approach to science and technology that ensures that they are used for the betterment of humanity and the environment, as well as privacy, security and well-being. At the same time, our pursuit of digital transformation and innovation should not push us towards global homogeneity. It should amplify our rich tapestry of cultures, experiences and perspectives. Cultural diversity is a strength for sustainable development, which should not only be protected but embraced, as it is an indispensable ingredient that can nurture even more creativity and innovation.

To help accelerate the achievement of the SDGs through digital transformation and innovation, we, young MPs, discussed the following proposed actions:

- 1. Regarding digital transformation**, we are calling for and suggesting that Member Parliaments:
 - a. Update parliamentary rules and working methods to allow for greater virtual participation of MPs, utilize interactive platforms that facilitate inclusive direct communication between constituents and representatives, and foster meaningful engagement of specific demographic groups, particularly youth, in the work of parliamentary committees;

- b. Consider developing or strengthening forward-looking parliamentary bodies, such as Committees of the Future and other suitable mechanisms with respect to each country's specific conditions, to help parliaments anticipate and respond to long-term trends or potential shocks, and ensuring that youth are involved in such bodies;
- c. Ensure all parliamentarians are equipped with the necessary knowledge and technical support to fully participate in online proceedings; enhance the use of virtual assistance to support parliamentarians; use AI tools to enhance the quality of legislative work; and develop a digital library of legal documents;
- d. Adopt laws and policies that help close the digital gap and ensure accessibility to all, including through low-cost access, building of digital infrastructure and skills-building;
- e. Develop suitable legal frameworks and strengthen international cooperation to protect their respective digital sovereignty to bring about a safe, healthy network environment and sustainable development;
- f. Adopt adequate policies and procedures to prevent and respond to any form of technology-facilitated harassment and violence against members of parliament, including violence against women parliamentarians;
- g. Advocate for the development of effective mechanisms and methods for collecting information and data to monitor the implementation of the SDGs;
- h. Support the role of the United Nations in developing standards and legal frameworks on cyberspace, digital transformation and AI on the basis of consensus.

2. Regarding innovation and start-ups, we are calling for and suggesting that Member Parliaments:

- a. Strengthen the innovation and start-up eco-system, including by developing legal frameworks for innovation and start-ups, scaling up our budgets to support youth-led and youth-inclusive enterprises, start-ups and innovation initiatives, including through funding, grants and technical assistance, and making sure they are aligned with the SDGs, especially on empowering young women;
- b. Promote education curricula that provide the necessary skills to prepare the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs, with an emphasis on digital skillsets; special focus should also be given to young women, including by incentivizing more to study in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields;
- c. Urge the IPU to consider possible avenues within existing structures for engaging on innovation and digital transformation issues;
- d. Promote global networking of young parliamentarians in digital transformation and innovation, within the framework of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, in close cooperation with the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament;
- e. Strengthen the nexus between the scientific and parliamentary communities to create more space for science to contribute to peace and sustainable development, with a priority being the involvement of youth;
- f. Encourage start-ups and innovation initiatives among youth and students, especially women, strengthen gender mainstreaming in accordance with the SDGs, and develop a separate programme for digital innovation and start-ups;
- g. Promote innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship in all fields, with a focus on FoodTech, as a way to actively contribute to the process of implementing the SDGs, by solving food security issues and ending famine.

3. Regarding promoting respect for cultural diversity for sustainable development, we call for and suggest that Member Parliaments:

- a. Help develop a common parliamentary approach to establishing a framework of principles and values in the decision-making, research and development around science and technology, such as the forthcoming IPU International Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology, which aims at ensuring that the development and application of science and technology are carried out in a responsible, ethical and sustainable manner;
- b. Contribute robustly to efforts intended to stem online violence against women and girls, including by promoting gender equality, curbing hate speech and regulating and managing AI in a way in which women and girls are protected and new technologies do not perpetuate gender biases;
- c. Strengthen data protection framework laws and other statutory instruments, especially concerning personal data and cyberthreats, and promote transparent and open-source algorithms;
- d. Promote inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and respect for cultural diversity and local knowledge as drivers of sustainable development, prosperity and peaceful coexistence;
- e. Promote culture as a driving force of sustainable development, commit to protecting and promoting cultural diversity, affirm the role of the creative economy and cultural industries and the role of culture and cultural diversity in the process of solving the difficulties and challenges facing humanity today, especially climate change, and prevent illegal trafficking and transfer of cultural heritage property;
- f. Promote respect for cultural diversity in the context of the fourth industrial revolution; strengthen cooperation for economic innovation, increased efficiency, and drivers for economic growth; at the same time, help State agencies operate more transparently and effectively on the roadmap for digitalization to narrow the development gap and ensure personal privacy in cyberspace, while keeping in mind national sovereignty.

We express our gratitude to the National Assembly of Viet Nam for having considerably, successfully and professionally hosted this Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, championing youth participation and promoting the achievement of the SDGs, including through the IPU and international and regional inter-parliamentary mechanisms. We stand ready to do our part in the mission to harness the power of technology and innovation for the SDGs, in a responsible way that leaves no one behind, especially not future generations, while respecting the United Nations Charter and international law. We stand together to keep the promises of the 2015 Hanoi Declaration, and to answer the urgent call of the 2030 Agenda.