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For democracy. For everyone.

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Draft Luanda Declaration

Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)

The buck stops with us. This is the overarching message that we, parliamentarians participating in the 147th IPU Assembly in Luanda, retain from our General Debate on *Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions*, corresponding to Goal 16 of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16), also known as the “governance goal”.

Our discussion highlighted the critical role of good governance as a societal good in its own right and as a means to the attainment of all the Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted in 2015. Good governance is the glue that binds people to each other and to their institutions, nurturing solidarity, civic engagement and political citizenship. At the same time, as defined under SDG 16, good governance enables sound policymaking and direct accountability to the people, without which we will not succeed in our shared struggles against poverty, inequality, conflict and environmental degradation, including the climate emergency, that are being experienced in every corner of the world.

We have taken stock of the many governance issues highlighted in SDG 16 that need immediate attention according to United Nations reports but also, and more importantly, of our experience in our own countries, where popular disaffection with the institutions of government – and with politics in general – is becoming ever more palpable.

As representatives of the people, we are keenly aware of our responsibility to address this state of affairs. We end this Assembly fully aware that SDG 16, more than any other SDG, relates to *parliament* as the key institution of governance in every country. Having the power to enact laws, adopt budgets and oversee the executive, we are uniquely positioned to make government work better at all levels – national, sub-national and local – and to restore the conditions for peaceful coexistence that support sustainable development and democracy in all their dimensions.

Topping the list of governance issues that we must tackle most urgently is the need to strengthen trust and ensure the more active participation of citizens in institutions at all levels, beginning with our own parliaments, where women and youth, as well as the poor and other disadvantaged groups, must be more equitably represented.

We believe that inclusion and representation are essential to building legitimacy and transparency, as the keys to more effective accountability. By opening up institutions to people from all walks of life and without discrimination, we can strengthen the people’s trust in their institutions, provide public services that deliver and develop policies that leave no one behind. With regard specifically to the key issue of fair representation of the various groups and political forces in parliaments, we will strive to review and reform as needed our electoral systems in the light of the IPU Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, as well as other international standards.

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The new Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, developed by the IPU in collaboration with the United Nations and other partner organizations, provide an important tool to help us assess and strengthen our parliaments according to the principles set out in the SDGs, such as effectiveness, accountability, transparency and participation. We welcome the publication of these Indicators, which can help to guide the development of our institutions. We will do our utmost to turn these principles into action and to report back on progress made.

Among the various possible solutions to make parliaments more inclusive, we will consider measures to promote ambitious and well-designed quotas aiming at gender parity and equitable representation of all groups, as well as aligning the minimum age limit to be eligible for public office with the voting age. We will endeavour to review our own policies and processes, with the aim of ensuring that leadership positions are equally shared between men and women within our institutions and build a culture of inclusiveness and non-discrimination in line with the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments.

The rule of law, the idea that no one is above the law, that all people are equal under the law, and that everyone has the right to be protected by the law, must lie at the core of our action to strengthen governance.

With this fundamental principle in mind, we will aim to curb corruption so that public resources are not diverted for personal gain and policies are not tailored to particular interests at the expense of the common good. Along these same lines, we will endeavour to free government and relevant regulatory bodies from the “corporate capture” that is a frequent cause of distortion in policy outcomes. Inspired by recent global initiatives to combat illicit financial and arms flows, we will strive to tighten the rules and close the loopholes that enable these most nefarious forms of corruption. We support audit institutions for their valuable role in ensuring transparency and accountability through independent verification of public spending and related government processes.

With regard to the justice system, we will aim to strengthen the impartiality of the courts, speed up trial times, extend legal aid and other facilities to improve access for the most vulnerable, expand the availability of less onerous processes such as arbitration and mediation, and ensure fairness in sentencing.

By extension, we will aspire to establish or strengthen independent national human rights institutions as essential tools for the promotion and protection of all human rights. We will seek to work closely with these institutions to implement their recommendations and to harmonize national legislation with international norms. In the context of this year’s 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we pledge to revitalize our actions to promote and protect human rights. We will strive to uphold the right of all legitimately constituted civil society organizations to make their voices heard on behalf of the groups they represent. We will also examine measures to strengthen the regulatory frameworks that govern the right to information so that, except for the most sensitive national security reasons, government-held information can be made available to the public on request and in a timely fashion.

There can be no peace without justice. As conflicts within and between countries continue to become alarmingly more frequent and severe, undermining development gains, we will seek to address the root causes of conflict that can often be found in economic inequality and discrimination against entire groups, due to gender, racial, ethnic, religious or cultural differences. We will also aim to invest more in *human* security – defined as the provision of food, health care, environmental security and other such contributors to human well-being – as the main path towards peace and development.

We reaffirm most strongly our belief in the rule of law, at both the national and international level, as the foundation of conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in dialogue and diplomacy as the only way toward lasting peace. We call on parties in all armed conflicts to abide by the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols with no exceptions. We encourage more frequent use of the International Court of Justice and other international judicial institutions as a key tool to resolve disputes between countries peacefully.

We cannot ignore the fact that our Assembly here in Angola has taken place against the backdrop of a rapidly escalating crisis in the Middle East. We express grave concern about the humanitarian consequences of the crisis and we implore the international community to take definitive action to ensure the unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief into Gaza without delay. Above all, the hostilities in this region must cease and negotiations must resume towards a sustainable two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Recognizing that most armed conflicts and related mediation efforts tend to be male-dominated, we will support more robust involvement of women and youth in peace processes. We will strive to take all necessary measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women, especially women in politics, as well as against minority and marginalized groups, and provide assistance to survivors.

A key measure of good governance is the quality of the civil service and of the public sector in general, which provide the most immediate interface between government and the people. We recognize the need for deep reforms of public administrations so that they are adequately staffed through fair and transparent recruitment processes as well as equipped with the most modern tools to provide quality service to the public. Most importantly, we will seek to ensure more direct citizens' input into public sector reforms and into the administration of public services, including health care, education and environmental preservation, so as to more effectively meet the needs of the people.

The success of all our reforms will depend most critically on the mobilization of financial and human resources. We are committed to reversing the tide of underinvestment in the institutions and the processes that lie at the core of SDG 16. In particular, a more coordinated effort must be made to collect data on gender, age, income and other criteria that are key to identifying those most at risk of being left behind. Relatively modest as a share of national budgets, the implementation cost of SDG 16 will pay high dividends in terms of producing positive social cohesion, peace, and development outcomes across the board. In this connection, we call on countries to review their development cooperation policies so that due emphasis is given to investments and capacity building in recipient countries' governance sectors.

In view of the major global assessment of SDG 16 expected at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2024, we will aim to conduct a thorough review of our national plans for SDG 16 and of the public sector in general, including through parliamentary hearings, special parliamentary commissions and other such initiatives. We encourage the IPU to collect and disseminate the findings from this exercise, and to highlight the good practices that may help mobilize further parliamentary action.

We are deeply grateful to our host, the National Assembly of Angola, as well as the Angolan authorities and the Angolan people in general, for providing us with this valuable opportunity to come together as a global parliamentary community. We look forward to taking this Declaration back to our parliaments and to playing our part in ensuring its effective implementation.