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T +41 22 919 41 50
F +41 22 919 41 60
E postbox@ipu.org
www.ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland

Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Group of Friends of Neutrality
Online Meeting of Speakers of Parliament

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Madam Chairperson of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan,
Esteemed Speakers of Parliament of the Group of Friends of Neutrality,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you at the opening of this first online meeting of Speakers of Parliament from countries of the recently formed Group of Friends of Neutrality for Peace, Security and Sustainable Development. I was most heartened to hear of this Group's focus on these areas, which are fully in line with the IPU's own vision and indeed correspond exactly to two of our main policy goals.

In fact, against a backdrop of escalating conflict around the world, the IPU membership has decided that peace and security should be our primary policy focus for 2024. The theme of your meeting today, *The role of parliamentary cooperation in strengthening peace and dialogue* echoes closely the theme we have chosen for our upcoming 148th Assembly in Geneva: *Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding*.

So, it is clear that we are on the same page. The IPU was founded as a platform for “peace and cooperation among peoples” and for nearly 135 years it has served as the hub of worldwide parliamentary dialogue. Parliaments are ideally placed to engage in diplomacy and cooperation in parallel with that undertaken by their governments, drawing on parliamentarians' diversity and experience to take a holistic approach to addressing conflict and building peace. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians must take their rightful place at the diplomatic table, providing a different perspective to global leaders who often act without restraint in world affairs.

Parliaments also have a critical role in upholding and revitalizing the multilateral system, with the United Nations at its core, and in ensuring that their governments respect international law and uphold various international treaties, agreements and conventions. Neutrality is a useful tool for parliamentary diplomacy, but for the IPU, mutual respect, solidarity and inclusiveness are our real watchwords. We also recognize that peace and sustainable development are inextricably linked, and our work never considers either of these topics without keeping a close eye on the other.

In practical terms, the IPU has striven for many years to bring together delegations from those of its Member Parliaments who are in conflict. Our Committee on Middle East Questions has long served as a forum in which representatives of Israel and Palestine – with support from other parliamentarians from the region and beyond – have come together for dialogue. In recent years, the Task Force on the peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine has been working to find common ground between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. And the IPU has frequently provided a unique setting in which parliamentarians from theatres of conflict as diverse as the Sahel, Cyprus, the Korean peninsula, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and many others, can come together, make their voices heard and try to find solutions and common ground.

I sincerely believe that parliaments have a vital role to play in strengthening peace and dialogue, and that cooperation on a regional and global scale is the best route to achieve this. I wish you every success in your deliberations today and look forward to hearing the outcomes. Thank you.