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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Beijing +30 Regional Review Meeting
Reviewing 30 years of Beijing Commitments to Accelerate Gender Equality in the ECE
Region

Geneva, 21 October 2024

Madam UN Under-Secretary General [**Ms. Tatiana Molcean**, Executive Secretary of UNECE],

Madam Deputy Executive Director of UN Women [**Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**],

Your Excellencies, Ministers, Ambassadors and other representatives of UN member states,

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues, dear friends,

I am honoured to be here with you today.

I address you not only as the Secretary General of the IPU—the global organization of parliaments—but also as Chair of the Global Board of the International Gender Champions and a longstanding believer in the power of gender equality for the benefit of the whole of society.

As we are about to mark 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we stand at a pivotal moment. For us to chart our way forward, it is critical to assess the progress made and acknowledge persisting challenges.

As we do so, let me join Tatiana in asking us to reflect on the recently adopted **Pact for the Future**. The Pact recalls the importance of our multilateral system, urging us not only to recommit to our global standards of human rights and sustainable development goals, but also to act boldly in delivering on the promises of Beijing. The Pact also recognises the **important role of Parliaments** and the IPU in driving and embodying the change that we want to see.

Over the past three decades, we have witnessed meaningful strides across the **12 critical areas of concern** outlined in 1995. From increased access to education and healthcare to greater economic and political participation, legal reforms, and strengthened protections for women and girls, we have seen tangible gains. These achievements are a testament to the dedication of countless persistent advocates, policymakers, and communities around the world. Today, it is essential that we recognise and celebrate these advancements.

However, this progress has not come easily. Too often, the momentum for gender equality has been met with deeply rooted patriarchal structures and mindsets that resist change. For every step forward, we have frequently found ourselves stalled or even pushed back. These barriers have often caused progress to stagnate, forcing women to defend the gains and to keep pushing against a tide of resistance.

Today, the progress we have made remains fragile, vulnerable to the **global backlash** that threatens to undermine the principles we have fought so hard to uphold. At times, it feels like a modern-day Sisyphian struggle—pushing the rock of equality uphill, only to see it slide back down.

Recent and ongoing crises—including the **COVID-19 pandemic**, **armed conflicts**, and the mounting challenges of **climate change and environmental degradation**—have highlighted two critical truths.

First, these crises impact women and girls disproportionately, exposing and deepening existing inequalities. **Second**, gender equality is the common denominator for sustainable progress, with women's leadership appearing as crucial to crafting solutions that are resilient and inclusive.

To ensure sustainable solutions, we must urgently confront **violence against women and girls as a systemic threat**. This abhorrent phenomenon touches every aspect of life—from the home and workplace to digital spaces and public life. We cannot call our mission fulfilled when women are still silenced, harmed, and killed simply for being who they are.

We also face a complex challenge with technological advancements. While **Artificial Intelligence** holds great potential for transformation, it also risks reinforcing gender biases if not developed and managed in a gender-sensitive manner. We must harness the power of these technologies responsibly, ensuring that they serve as tools for equity rather than as mechanisms that deepen inequalities.

I believe I would be saying the obvious: **Women's leadership** in all areas of life is essential, from the negotiation table to the national parliament, from the boardroom to the courtroom. When women have an equal place at the decision-making table, our institutions become stronger, our policies more effective, and our societies more cohesive. Women's perspectives lead to more holistic and lasting solutions to our global challenges.

However, progress in **women's political participation** has been disappointingly slow. This year has been billed as a super election year and there had been hope that the number of women in leadership would be given a big boost. Following parliamentary renewals since January this year, the global share of women MPs has increased by just a 0.1 percentage point, reaching 27%. We have certainly come a long way from 11.3% in 1995. Indeed, this is no mean feat. But we are seeing a slowdown which may lead to stagnation and eventually reversal in gains made.

Yet, we know gender parity is possible. We've seen that happen in parliamentary chambers across all regions in the world. In the ECE region, today we have Andorra with 50% women in Parliament, and Canada's Senate which has 56%.

To achieve parity, we must embed this requirement in the Constitution, actively promote laws and policies such as quotas for women's candidacies, eliminate existing barriers such as the high costs of political campaigns and biased media coverage, and foster an environment where their voices can thrive free from violence and discrimination. The IPU has consistently advocated for this transformation, emphasising that parliaments must be places where women are not only present but also empowered to lead. After all, they have the powers. They need to muster the political commitment.

Women leaders and young women trailblazers play a critical role as powerful role models, inspiring the next generation to envision themselves as leaders and catalysts for change. Their active involvement in political decision-making not only improves governance but also creates a ripple effect of inclusivity that benefits society at large.

This week we will see yet another milestone with the adoption of the CEDAW Committee's **General Recommendation No. 40 (GR40)** which is grounded on parity in numbers and influence, and intergenerational, inclusive, intersectional and gender-transformative leadership. The IPU is a proud partner of CEDAW and UN Women in this endeavour. We are committed to ensuring this GR becomes a roadmap to our Member Parliaments.

But none of us can achieve this alone. Let me highlight the importance of partnerships and networks such as the **Generation Equality Forum (GEF)** and the **International Gender Champions**. These platforms are instrumental in amplifying our impact. As Chair of the Global Board of the International Gender Champions, I am committed to continuing to mobilise the network of global leaders to drive transformative change in women's leadership and protect this against violence.

As we look ahead to **2025**, we have an opportunity to use these platforms and momentum as turning points to accelerate gender equality. The road may be long, but with collective determination and action, we can transform our commitments into concrete results.

Let this Beijing+30 moment be more than a commemoration. Let it be a true, honest, frank review. Let it mark the beginning of a new era in which we reset our pace and renew our commitment to building a future defined not just by words, but by transformative action.

Our efforts this year will honour the legacy of Beijing and lay the groundwork for a new chapter of bold, decisive progress toward true gender equality. Together, let us turn reflection into action and drive change that will shape a more inclusive and equitable future for all. I am committed to doing my part and bringing one constituency, the parliamentary community.

Thank you.