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For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

2025 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations – Opening remarks

New York, 13 February 2025

President of the General Assembly,
Secretary General of the IPU,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2025 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, which is dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs.

It is a great honor for me to join with you, President Yang, in opening this event.

The SDGs, the world's most important global commitment against poverty, inequality, peace and environmental sustainability, are badly off track. And there remain only five years to their deadline of 2030.

The IPU and the UN system have joined forces to support the implementation of the SDGs since the very beginning, in 2015.

We are proud of our achievements, assisting parliaments with the tools and knowledge to turn the global goals into actionable national plans.

As a concrete example, just this past month, the IPU published a new toolkit for parliamentarians - SDG-Informed Legislative Scrutiny - which you can find on our website.

At the political level, there have been countless pronouncements over the past ten years at the IPU as well as the UN.

The UN's General Assembly resolution 77/159 of December 2022, entitled Enhancing the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, tops the list.

And yet, despite all this work at both operational and political levels, the SDGs are still in trouble.

Why?

At this meeting, we will take a close look at three key factors contributing to this disappointing performance and dedicate ourselves to working harder for this agenda:

First, we will look at the politics that keep distracting us from this most important task.

We will confront head on the political reasons why the SDGs have struggled to get traction in so many parliaments. Is there political opposition to this agenda, and where does it come from? Do parliaments and governments underestimate what is at stake?

It is true that we have gone through turbulent times in international relations and in the world economy, and national emergencies keep propping up everywhere. Our politics are divided and divisive.

But none of this should interfere with the SDGs that were adopted by consensus and that everyone thought perfectly doable.

In fact, in 2015, some experts believed that the SDGs were not ambitious enough!

Second, this morning we will look at the institutional set up that in too many places was neglected or left incomplete. There are various illustrations of this.

To this day, just one third of parliaments are meaningfully involved in the national progress reports that their governments submit to the UN each year. In many countries, despite IPU's efforts, parliaments are unaware that their governments are working on such reports.

More broadly, while a number of parliaments have set up SDGs committees or groups, these structures are often under-capacitated, unable to focus the legislative agenda on the SDGs.

In too many parliaments, still, there is no institutional reflex to connect each bill under review to the relevant SDGs.

Colleagues, we have to do better.

What does it take for parliaments to exercise more effective oversight in this arena?

Collectively, and individually, we must get our houses in order so that all MPs are aware of the SDGs and each parliament has effective structures and processes to align legislation with the SDGs.

The SDGs require long-term plans at the national level that can only stay on track if they are ingrained in the various institutions of government.

Third, much of this meeting will focus on financing the SDGs. That bill is estimated today at 2.5 to 4 trillion dollars over the next five years.

This discussion will link directly to the preparatory process for the 4th Conference on Financing for Development that is to take place in Spain at the end of June.

Right next door, in the ECOSOC chamber, diplomats from our countries are reviewing the zero draft of the outcome document for that conference which, smartly, includes several references to the oversight role of parliaments.

We will look in particular at aid, debt, trade, and investments – all areas where parliaments have a direct say, particularly via the budget process.

For me, money per se is not the real problem. In a world economy of some 100 trillion dollars, surely, we should be able to find or raise the resources for the SDGs.

Aside from technicalities, the fundamental problem is one of resource distribution. Surely, we must act on the principle of solidarity with the most vulnerable and those who have been left behind.

Indeed, in a world where 20 percent of the population consumes 80 percent of all resources, where most of the productive assets are held by a small group of people, and entire populations go without the essentials of life despite working hard every day, we need a lot more solidarity.

As Parliamentarians, we need to be willing to think less in terms of our own political interests and more in terms of the common good.

Friends,

Last year's Summit for the Future concluded with a declaration that included a call for the UN to deepen its relationship with national parliaments.

This year's hearing is a golden opportunity to provide a parliamentary perspective on issues of critical importance to the international community and to our constituents at home.

I am pleased that the President of the General Assembly will circulate the final report of this meeting to the General Assembly.

Please, let's give this discussion our best attention and focus on actionable recommendations to make life better for all.

Thank you.