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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Post-Global Multistakeholder Summit on Advancing Gender Equality in Nationality Laws Online Roundtable

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues,

It is a real pleasure for me to welcome you to this online roundtable on advancing gender equality in nationality laws. On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and each of the partner organizations – the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, Equality Now, UNHCR and UN Women—I thank you for your presence here today and commitment to pursuing our collaboration and joint efforts.

This roundtable builds on last December’s successful Global Multistakeholder Summit – in which you all took part – which was a unique opportunity to bring together a diverse group of key actors from all over the world to build understanding and synergies to support initiatives towards gender equality in nationality laws in your respective countries. I was personally very pleased to witness the willingness and commitment among all participants – parliamentarians, government officials and civil society representatives – to work together and identify common efforts. I believe that we all concluded the December meeting with the strong belief that, if we join forces and build on each others strengths, then progress is possible.

Six months down the line, we meet again. Today’s roundtable is an important opportunity to take stock of developments, learn from each other and develop further collaboration across the board. While the commitment is there, we need to acknowledge that the road ahead is still long. Women from over 24 countries are still denied the right to confer their nationality on their children on an equal basis to men. This results in denial of rights, hardships for the affected families, women and children, impacts on development and social cohesion, and, last but not least, statelessness. Over 4 million men and women do not yet enjoy the right to a nationality today, and this is partly due to the consequences arising from gender discrimination in nationality laws.

But, as we all know, solutions are there.

As a result of your discussions in December, several concrete actions were proposed, tailored to each of your countries’ specific situations. There is of course no “one fits all” solution, and we acknowledge the importance of taking into account cultural, political and societal specificities. I do believe, however, that many common elements were identified, several of which require parliaments and their members to take the lead.

There is no gainsaying that parliamentarians can and must play a key role in resolving and preventing gender discrimination and statelessness domestically. Small adjustments to nationality laws can go a long way in impacting the lives of individuals and communities. Some of the concrete actions and commitments identified by parliamentarians who participated in last year’s Summit include:

- Carrying out a mapping exercise on the impact of nationality-related reforms, or the lack thereof;
- Building bridges and alliances within parliament and outside parliament with national stakeholders for gender equality reforms;
- Advocating for legislation on gender equality and raising awareness on women’s rights;

- And examining and adopting budgets from a gender perspective.

These are great examples of concrete actions that can be taken. They are certainly not easy and require political will, opportunities and, I dare say, political courage as well. But I am confident that change is possible.

Recent developments in Malaysia are cause for hope. The constitutional amendments voted on and passed by the Parliament of Malaysia in October 2024 have recently been officially gazetted. This represents a milestone in the fight against statelessness and gender discrimination in nationality laws. It should inspire all of us, and in particular decision-makers, to speak out, explain, engage, and push for change.

This is why we are very pleased to provide this opportunity to continue together the movement for change. Today's roundtable will enable all of you to discuss recent developments and share updates on progress made or challenges faced since the Summit. We look forward to hearing from each of you and building on the open and collaborative spirit that drove the Summit last year.

In today's world, where cooperation and partnerships are needed more than ever, initiatives such as this showcase the importance of collaborative efforts that uphold values such as inclusion, solidarity, and shared responsibility. Ending gender discrimination in nationality laws cannot be achieved in any other way.

In conclusion, allow me to renew our commitment to mobilizing and engaging parliaments, governments and civil society organizations in fighting discrimination in nationality laws and ending statelessness. We are confident that this roundtable will foster dialogue and cooperation that can lead to significant change and reforms. This will not be easy but you can certainly count on us to support you in your efforts towards this goal.