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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Meeting of the Network of African Parliamentary Committees on Health (NEPACOH)
Lusaka, Zambia

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Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Partners and Guests,

I welcome this opportunity to address you today at this important meeting of the Network of African Parliamentary Committees on Health, which is focusing on strategies and experiences on the role of parliamentarians in addressing key health challenges on the African continent.

At the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global organization of national parliaments, we strongly believe in the transformative role of parliaments. At the regional and global level, at a time when dialogue, solidarity, and multilateralism are facing significant challenges, parliamentarians represent the voice of the people. You are a vital link between international commitments and frameworks, and the local realities, needs, and aspirations of the communities you serve.

At the national level, parliaments are where those aspirations become reality—through laws, policies, and budgets that aim to advance the greater good. This is particularly true for health. Parliamentary health committees, and especially their chairs, play a pivotal role in shaping health agendas and ensuring that evidence, equity and accountability remain at the center of decision-making for translating political commitments into sustained action.

Health is a key driver of sustainable development. It is a precondition for people not just to survive, but to thrive in their families, communities, and societies. Health systems that are equitable and resilient underpin economic growth, social cohesion, and human dignity. In this sense, health can also be a powerful driver of democracy.

As you discuss equity and resilience during this meeting, it is essential to reflect on inclusive parliamentary processes and meaningful opportunities for engagement with communities, civil society, and technical experts. Such engagement helps ground parliamentary debates in lived realities, strengthens trust in institutions, and ultimately builds more responsive and effective parliaments that deliver for all segments of society—especially the most vulnerable.

The IPU has been working in this space for twenty years. Over this time, we have successfully fostered new channels of communication and cooperation between parliaments and health stakeholders in Malawi; built the capacities of parliamentarians in Benin on universal health coverage; and accompanied Rwanda in strengthening sexual and reproductive health legislation, among other initiatives. We have also been working with the Parliament of Zambia on operationalizing legislation on child marriage. Let me take this opportunity to commend the leadership of the Zambian Speaker and her Parliament for their engagement in the IPU and the demonstrated commitment to health, as well as other key issues such as climate change and dealing with methane emissions. These experiences demonstrate that when parliaments are empowered, informed, and connected, they can be catalysts for lasting health and social outcomes.

In today's complex and rapidly changing world, it is also critical to understand and address emerging vulnerabilities across different contexts. For example, we are currently supporting processes in Southern Africa that explore the intersections between climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights—

an area that clearly illustrates how health challenges are increasingly shaped by broader social and environmental drivers, and the importance of addressing them with a long-term view.

I hope this meeting will continue to provide a strong space for dialogue and exchange on health, ensuring it remains a priority on parliamentary agendas—not in isolation, but as a cornerstone of equity, resilience, sustainability, and democracy.

I wish you productive and inspiring discussions. Thank you.