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Speech by Ms. Anda Filip, IPU Secretary General

Asia-Pacific Regional Multistakeholder Convening on Advancing Gender Equality in Nationality Laws

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues,

It is a pleasure for me to address you today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This is my first time addressing many of you as Secretary General of the IPU, following my election in April this year. Although I was not able to join you in person in Kuala Lumpur this time – I feel honoured to be able to deliver this message to you today.

From the outset, I would like to thank each of the organizations – the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, Equality Now, the Global Alliance to end Stateslesness, UNHCR and UN Women – that have again partnered with the IPU to organize another very important gathering, bringing representatives from the Asia-Pacific region together to discuss strategies on how to advance gender equality in nationality laws.

This Convening marks an important step in our regional and global efforts to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws, and follows the success of our Global Multistakeholder Summit in Geneva in December 2024, and the Africa Regional Convening in February this year. These events have been unique opportunities for dialogue and exchange on how different stakeholders can work together towards advancing gender-equal nationality rights. Since then, important reforms have been undertaken, but much is yet to be done.

Today, women are still denied the right to confer their nationality on their children on an equal basis to men in over 24 countries – with 4 of these countries being in the Asia-Pacific region. Beyond that, 8 countries in the region also have gender-discriminatory nationality law provisions regarding the ability of a citizen's spouse to acquire nationality. While these provisions stem from specific national situations and considerations, all of them have a similar impact: they are discriminatory; they lead to hardships for the affected families, women and children; they show a lack of respect for basic human rights; and they negatively impact development and social cohesion. These discriminatory provisions are also a major cause of statelessness.

Let me be clear: we must no longer let gender discriminatory nationality laws condemn women and men, girls and boys around the world to statelessness and exclusion. Fighting gender discrimination and putting an end to statelessness are closely aligned with the IPU's mission to empower parliaments and parliamentarians to promote peace, democracy and sustainable development around the world – which is why this issue is a top concern for the IPU.

On the one hand, gender equality is at the core of IPU's work. My election as the first woman Secretary General of the IPU shows that our organization has led by example when it comes to prioritizing gender equality; not as a theoretical goal to be pursued, but as a concrete action to be taken. This builds on the IPU's contribution over the years to national legislative processes for equal gender rights in every corner of the world, including in parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region, by supporting women in parliament and parliaments' transformation into gender-sensitive institutions that deliver on women's rights. It is our responsibility to remain vigilant and enhance our efforts to defend and promote women's rights.

On the other hand, the IPU has been engaged in fighting statelessness for close to 20 years now. Following our pledge to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and as a proud member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, the IPU is committed to continuing its work on enhancing parliamentary engagement in the fight against statelessness. We are convinced that ending gender discrimination in nationality laws – a root cause of many of the over 4 million cases of statelessness identified today around the world – cannot be achieved without meaningful parliamentary engagement.

And we know that the Asia-Pacific region can lead the way towards such a goal. Malaysia's 2024 constitutional amendment aiming to uphold women's right to confer nationality on their children born abroad on an equal basis with men represents a milestone – which we were proud to ackolwedge and celebrate at the 150th IPU Assembly in April 2025 in Uzbekistan. The recent reforms in Nepal leading to the expansion of the ability of single mothers to confer nationality on their children also show that there is momentum to end gender discrimination in nationality laws in the Asia-Pacific region. These achievements testify how this region can lead the world in equality and justice.

As you continue with this Convening, where you have been working on strategic approaches and leveraging your role in nationality law reform processes, I would like to leave you with two key messages on how parliaments can make a significant difference in advancing gender-equal nationality rights at the national level:

- First, parliaments have the tools and opportunity to make a change. They can foster strong political will. As decision-makers, parliamentarians can push for legislative reforms on nationality laws, even in complex and sensitive settings. They can adopt and ensure implementation of legislation that is consistent with international law, thus resolving and preventing statelessness domestically.

- Second, parliaments can be the voice of the voiceless. They are well-positoned to listen and address misconceptions, alleviate misunderstandings and lead by example. Addressing gender inequality requires a societal shift, and parliamentarians can the be the champions of such a change.

Colleagues,

To conclude, the IPU would like to express its renewed commitment to mobilizing and engaging the parliamentary community in fighting gender discrimination in nationality laws and ending statelessness. We are confident that the outcome of this Convening will result in the amplification of efforts and the building of partnerships for significant change and reforms in the Asia Pacific region. You can count on the IPU, and all the partners here today, to support your efforts towards this goal.

Thank you.