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IPU Address

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Honourable Speakers of Parliament,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you at this session that will discuss the important question of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region for the achievement of the SDGs. Let me start by thanking the National Assembly of Viet Nam, in particular Madam Speaker, Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, for receiving us with such warm hospitality.

I am very pleased to be here with you together with the IPU President, Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron and former IPU President Saber Chowdhury. This high-level IPU participation in the 26th Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum represents the continuation of a strong partnership between the National Assembly of Viet Nam and our Organization. This partnership was crowned in 2015 when the National Assembly hosted the 132nd IPU Assembly in Hanoi, the single largest gathering Viet Nam has ever hosted. This Assembly adopted a number of important decisions but allow me to single out the Hanoi Declaration on the SDGs: Turning words into action. As the President already pointed out in her speech at the Opening Ceremony, this document is the roadmap for parliamentary engagement with the SDGs and it has inspired IPU action on the goals ever since.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given how pivotal the SDGs were going to be, very early on the IPU began to organize a parliamentary input to the United Nations so that the goals would include the views of parliamentarians. The perspectives of parliaments and parliamentarians from across the globe have indeed enriched the formulation and articulation of the SDGs and the IPU is proud to have contributed to this process. Through this work, Members of the IPU reaffirmed their vision of sustainable development based on human rights, equality, poverty eradication, peace and security, and committed to taking the necessary action to carry forward the SDGs.

As members of the parliamentary community engage with the SDGs, we need to continuously ask ourselves what difference our work and actions make for the people. Do they improve economic well-being of the poorest and most marginalized? Do they ensure quality education and health care for rural children and the urban poor? Do they respond to the specific needs of women and young people? These are just some of the questions that we need to keep in mind as we promote democratic values and strengthen the capacity of our parliaments to implement the SDGs.

The SDGs loom large in the IPU Strategy and we are taking steps to mainstream the goals throughout our work. Similarly, we are developing a series of tools and activities to help parliaments institutionalize the goals and take effective action through

legislation and oversight. Last year the IPU partnered with UNDP to develop an SDGs self-assessment toolkit for parliaments, which provides an important opportunity for MPs to review key processes and identify institutional gaps. The toolkit enables parliaments to discuss issues, gather information and answer questions that help them make informed decisions about the most suitable and effective way to engage in SDGs implementation.

The use of the SDGs self-assessment toolkit has already resulted in important parliamentary decisions and initiatives. As an example, the Parliament of Fiji, and I recognize the presence of its Speaker here, Ms. Jiko Luveni, will include the SDGs in induction courses for new MPs and will make it mandatory for the committees to conduct systematic SDGs assessment of draft bills. In Serbia, a public hearing on the draft voluntary national review to the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will be held at the National Assembly and MPs committed to intensifying outreach to young people and marginalized groups. These developments will have an important impact on SDG implementation and on ensuring that no one is left behind. Assisting parliaments in using the SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit and fostering action at the national level is one of IPU's priorities in 2018.

We at the IPU are also very pleased to see that our Members actively promote regional and interregional parliamentary cooperation on the SDGs. Under the auspices of the IPU, the Parliaments of Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia have already met three times to discuss and share experiences about SDG implementation. The SDG regional seminars for Latin American and African parliaments have also taken place with follow-up scheduled or planned in the coming months.

The parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region have been particularly active. The Speakers of Parliament from South Asia decided to establish the South Asian Speakers' Forum on the SDGs through which they work with the IPU's support to promote achievement of the goals. Since 2016, we have partnered with the National People's Congress of China to promote annual interregional exchanges on the SDGs. In May 2017, the IPU and the National Assembly of Viet Nam for the first time gathered parliaments of the whole Asia-Pacific region in a conference in Ho Chi Minh City, to discuss their role in delivering on the SDGs and contributing to the fight against climate change.

Allow me to conclude my speech by sharing with you some highlights and recommendations that emerged from this conference.

There is clear consensus among parliaments of the region that climate change is one of the most serious threats to sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Without concrete responses, climate change could put populations at risk, endanger households and government revenues and increase poverty, thereby causing social fragility and further inequalities. All these factors need to be taken into account in relevant legislation and programming.

The parliaments of the Asia-Pacific region also stressed that parliamentarians play a crucial role in translating the SDGs into legislation and policies, and in integrating them into national development plans with country-specific goals. They emphasized the importance of involving citizens, especially vulnerable groups—who are disproportionately affected by climate change—in the development of such plans.

Our conference also discussed the impact of climate change on women—who tend to be more adversely affected by it than men—and on public health. Its outcome document calls on parliaments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment to help achieve sustainable development. It also calls on parliaments to

ensure that affordable and quality health care is available for all citizens, especially those adversely affected by climate change.

The regional conference concluded with a call on parliaments to promote and advocate for strong regional and international cooperation on the SDGs and climate change, and the development of joint projects between countries in the service of peace, stability and prosperity.

The SDGs and the sustainable development agenda as a whole give parliaments the opportunity to prove their legitimacy and respond adequately to the challenge of delivering on their peoples' expectations. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put parliaments and their members on the map, to prove that they are relevant by delivering on the expectations of the people.

The IPU remains committed to assisting these efforts and to working with you to promote strong regional parliamentary cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. I look forward to our continued collaboration.