



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Address of the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong

High-Level International Conference on Supporting the Implementation of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Tbilisi, 28 May 2018

Honorable Speaker of Parliament,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you at the beginning of this important gathering. Let me start by thanking the Parliament of Georgia, in particular Mr. Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, for receiving me with such warm hospitality. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations as Georgia celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the First Democratic Republic on 26 May.

My participation in this event represents a continuation of a trustful partnership that started in 1997 when the Parliament of Georgia became a member of the IPU. I am confident that this partnership will continue to yield many good results in this critical time as the world transforms its social, economic and environmental development and is united in efforts to eradicate poverty once and for all through the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IPU has been very steadfast in its efforts to mobilize parliaments in support of the SDGs. The IPU has indeed ensured that the SDGs are informed by the parliamentary perspective. Members of the IPU have 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 and the planet. Do they improve economic wellbeing of the poorest and most marginalized? Do they respond to the specific needs of women and young people? Do they reflect human rights principles? Do they ensure that the legislative response to climate change is consistent with the aims of the national climate legislation, the Paris Agreement and other goals like poverty reduction, gender equality, etc.? 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 effectively implement the SDGs.

Indeed, the sustainable development agenda provides parliaments with a solid platform on which to build their credibility and relevance by using their powers to make a difference in the lives of the people. Yet, many parliaments are challenged today by

the lack of skills and knowledge and other constraints. These challenges need to be addressed for effective parliamentary inputs.

The IPU is therefore developing a series of tools and activities to help parliaments institutionalize the goals and take effective action through legislation and oversight. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs have been endorsed as a global framework but their implementation has to be tailored to national priorities. Parliaments in particular have important responsibilities and expectations from them are high. That is why in 2016 the IPU partnered with UNDP to design an SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit to help parliaments identify their own priorities and make an informed decision about the most suitable and effective way to engage in SDG implementation.

I am very much pleased to see that the Parliament of Georgia is actively engaged in the SDGs and this conference is evidence of that commitment. In addition, the Parliament is working closely with the IPU and UNDP to prepare for a SDGs self-assessment exercise that will take place just a week from now on 4-5 June 2018. This will be a precious opportunity for the Parliament to identify its baselines and establish a framework for an action plan. Examining good practices, lessons learned and challenges through this action-oriented process will not only help parliamentarians tailor their key functions so that they are in conformity with the SDGs but also assume full ownership of the findings of this exercise.

The IPU is very pleased to be partnering with the Parliament of Georgia in performing this exercise. It will be the first parliament in the Eurasia region to use the IPU/UNDP toolkit. Assisting parliaments in using the SDG Self-Assessment Toolkit and fostering action at the national level is one of IPU's priorities in 2018. The parliaments of Fiji, Serbia and Mali have already undertaken this SDG self-assessment which has yielded important parliamentary decisions and initiatives.

As an example, thanks to the self-assessment the Parliament of Fiji has adopted an action plan that emphasizes the importance of: consistent engagement with government and civil society in order to ensure better access to data. The Parliament has also launched the idea of including the SDGs in induction courses for new MPs; making it mandatory to conduct systematic SDGs assessment of draft bills; and organizing more consultations on the SDGs with citizens and communities in rural/remote areas.

In Serbia, Parliamentary committees have agreed to include SDG implementation in their oversight work and pledged to pay special attention to the work of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. MPs are committed to supporting laws directly linked to the SDGs and to intensifying outreach to young people and marginalized groups so as to better understand their needs and incorporate them into work on the SDGs.

In Mali, the exercise has helped the Parliament identify priorities for short- and medium-term operational SDG strategies. MPs have identified actions and concrete goals in the areas of legislation, budget, oversight and representation. Recommendations include creating a communications strategy for the Parliament on SDGs, allocating a budget for their implementation, appointing a focal point for SDGs and carrying out capacity-building for relevant staff. These developments will have an important impact on SDG implementation and on ensuring that no one is left behind.

Cooperation and exchanges among parliaments at the regional and interregional level are instrumental in effective SDG implementation. With the support of the IPU, the Parliaments of Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia have just met last week

in Belgrade (Serbia) for the fourth time in order to discuss and share experiences about SDG implementation. The Speakers of Parliaments from South Asia decided to establish the South Asian Speakers' Forum on the SDGs through which they work with IPU's support to promote achievement of the Goals. Regional seminars are also taking place in Latin America, Africa and Asia-Pacific. We partner with the National People's Congress of China to promote inter-regional exchanges on the SDGs.

As you embark on this important conference today, I would like to take a few moments to reflect with you on some of the lessons learned so far from working with parliaments and parliamentarians on the SDGs. I see four in particular.

1/ In a general sense, parliaments are much more aware of the SDGs than they were of the MDGs. Certainly this is a result of the more inclusive preparatory process for the design of the SDGs. We have observed a lot of interest and goodwill towards the SDGs. Parliamentarians who are familiar with the SDGs tend to quickly understand their political interest.

2/ Regional cooperation around the SDGs is welcomed and is necessary. Through the regional seminars we have organized with parliaments, we have observed a lot of political will to establish dialogue, to set aside tensions that can exist between countries, and to use the SDGs as a platform for cooperation. Our experience is that countries see the SDGs as an opportunity to foster inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation on concrete issues ranging from the economy, health to resource management.

3/ National ownership remains a challenge. At the governmental level, many countries are revising their national development plans or producing specific SDG plans. Yet parliaments seem to be only weakly associated with these processes. In many countries, there are still questions about whether parliament should even be part of the SDG coordination body or whether its role should be to monitor the work of these bodies and hold them to account.

4/ Which points perhaps to the biggest lesson learned: that often parliaments are willing to "do something", but may be unsure about what exactly that thing should be. Some parliaments have moved to establish SDG committees, but they have quickly realized that the SDG agenda is too broad to be covered by one committee alone, and that the SDGs overlap with many existing committees in Parliament. That is why the self-assessment methodology is so important, insofar as it allows parliaments to determine for themselves on a case-by-case basis how to adapt their existing structures and processes to accommodate the SDG agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's conference gives us a precious opportunity to address these and other fundamental questions that range from human rights to environmental protection. All these themes are extremely important to the IPU.

Legislators bear responsibility for reviewing all proposed legislation and the budget through a pro-poor, gender-sensitive and human rights-based lens. When it comes to human rights, parliaments and parliamentarians are essential: parliamentary activities as a whole—legislating, budgeting and overseeing the executive branch—cover the entire spectrum of political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights and thus have an immediate impact on the enjoyment of these rights by the people. Parliaments should translate the international commitments into national policies and laws, and guarantee

that they meet the needs of the people, break down policy silos, uphold human rights and leave no one behind.

Regarding environmental protection, the IPU is committed to taking action on climate change and ensuring that IPU Member Parliaments effectively translate the Paris Agreement into appropriate national legislation and budget allocations. In 2016, our Members adopted a Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change that serves as a guide for parliamentary action in this area. We work closely with UN Environment and other partners in helping parliaments provide a comprehensive legislative response to climate change.

I congratulate the Parliament of Georgia once more for its leadership on the SDGs. I look forward to learning from you during this conference and I wish us all a very good meeting.

Thank you