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South Asian Speakers' Summit on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Malé, Maldives, 1 and 2 September 2019

Malé Declaration

We, Speakers of Parliament from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, assembled in Malé, Maldives, on 1 and 2 September 2019, for the fourth South Asian Speakers' Summit on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) organized jointly by the People's Majlis of the Maldives and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The Summit built on the conclusions of our previous summits held in Bangladesh (2016), India (2017) and Sri Lanka (2018) and allowed us to continue to develop dialogue and parliamentary cooperation on achieving the SDGs. We welcomed the active engagement of all participants as they shared their good practices and lessons learned; and we benefited from the rich contribution of parliamentarians, government representatives, United Nations experts, the IPU, research institutes and civil society.

We debated three issues of particular importance as our countries implement the SDGs: (1) Promoting equality at work, including equal remuneration and creating jobs for young people; (2) Nutrition and food security as drivers of maternal, child and adolescent health in the South Asian region; and (3) Catalyzing the global agenda on climate change – overcoming challenges and using opportunities to strengthen the regional agenda for delivering on the Paris Agreement.

We identified the following actionable and goal-oriented recommendations to advance parliamentary engagement with the SDGs in our respective countries:

1. We acknowledge that the SDGs provide a blueprint for a more sustainable future where no one is left behind. We commend the progress our countries have made and applaud what they have completed so far in realizing the SDGs. We expect the momentum and good work to continue to make SDGs a reality by 2030. According to available United Nations data, the region is not on track to achieve most goals of the 2030 Agenda. **We are therefore committed to strengthening the work of parliaments on SDG implementation and ensuring that they fully exercise all their functions in this regard.**
2. Parliaments play a crucial role in supporting implementation of the SDGs through their legislative, oversight and budgetary functions. The SDGs are a unique opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to improving people's lives and the health of the planet. Parliaments enact legislation that supports implementation of their country's national sustainable development strategy. **Parliaments apply an SDG lens to their key parliamentary functions and define frameworks to periodically monitor government action. Parliamentary hearings, question times and plenary reports should be used more effectively to oversee action and bring the SDGs to the attention of the public and the media, thereby encouraging accountability at all levels.**
3. We acknowledge that parliaments should analyse their capacity to deliver on the SDGs at the earliest opportunity to make sure that their strategy is adequate, comprehensive and effective. **Such an assessment would allow our parliaments to design appropriate strategies and mechanisms for better engagement with the implementation of the SDGs.**
4. Combating inequalities and unequal remuneration should be a priority. Parliaments have a key role in addressing the social and economic norms and factors that keep women out of the workforce. We acknowledge that there have been some advances, especially on gender parity in education. **We commit to promoting within our parliaments action to ensure equality at work and equal pay so that our countries can continue to grow with the contribution of its women and men. We**

also commit to addressing the root causes of women's underrepresentation, in particular by strengthening gender equality in our laws and programmes, and by taking initiatives to enhance women participation in politics and in leadership positions. In particular, we commit to considering quota and other incentives to boost the political empowerment of women including through access to parliament.

5. Young people also face great challenges in accessing the labour market and decent work. Considering that young people represent a considerable portion of our society, parliaments should promulgate laws that place job creation and decent work at the centre of national policy agendas. Laws and programmes to help young people find jobs, or to find training for future jobs, are also crucial. **We must invest in our young men and women by providing them with the opportunity to access the labour market as well as funds and loans to help them bring their innovative ideas to life.**
6. We acknowledge that malnutrition in all its forms is a major challenge for the South Asian region. Taken together, maternal and child undernutrition and child and adult overweight and non-communicable diseases affect a range of SDG goals and targets, including maternal and child mortality, educational attainment and economic growth. **We will ensure that this issue is placed high on the agenda of our parliaments and that relevant policies and legislative measures are taken.**
7. We recognize that malnutrition has many antecedents, including the status of girls and women in our societies, poverty and food security, sanitation and public awareness about the importance of healthy diets, and other nutrition practices such as physical activity. Tackling malnutrition effectively will require appropriate policies and legislation to address the many antecedents of malnutrition in our countries and across the region. We emphasize that efforts towards gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment offer great potential to accelerate progress on nutrition and health. Parliaments should work to improve access to healthy foods and improve their availability and cost. **Parliaments should also highlight, through various means, the need for legislation to restrict marketing of unhealthy foods, to improve nutrition labelling and to tax unhealthy foods and drinks.** This would be a way to address maternal and child undernutrition as well as the high burden of non-communicable diseases our region faces. **We commit to using our parliamentary functions to scale up nutrition within health systems and to improving the flow of information to consumers about nutrition. We will also do our best to track progress on the implementation of SDG 2 (zero hunger) and 3 (good health and well-being).**
8. Climate change affects our ability to achieve the SDGs, and countries in South Asia are among the most vulnerable in the world to the impacts of climate change. In particular, our region experiences severe flooding and landslides as a consequence of sea-level rise and extreme rainfall. We also see extended periods of drought affecting rural areas and a disproportionate increase in food insecurity among the poorest and most vulnerable. In South Asia, smog is also a major issue. We therefore reaffirm the need expressed at our previous summit in Colombo for an urgent reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions. We acknowledge that parliaments play a vital role in overseeing the effective national implementation of the Paris Agreement by ensuring that each country delivers on their nationally determined contributions. **Furthermore, parliaments must use their budgetary and legislative powers to create an enabling environment, including through mechanisms for disaster risk and climate financing. In this direction the Summit calls upon the developed nations to abide by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR). As a first step the Summit expects them to honour their commitment to mobilize without any further delay USD 100 billion annually. The Summit also expects liberal contributions from the developed countries to the Green Climate Fund which has till now only been able to muster a contribution of USD 10.3 billion.**
9. We further acknowledge that many climate and disaster risks stretch across borders. We don't want to see the remaining tropical forests destroyed, and **so we are committed to using technology to improve farming yields, to improving air quality and to preventing land degradation. We therefore call for greater and urgent cooperation among the South Asian countries to strengthen the regional response to the challenges of climate change and to progress**

towards a more sustainable and climate-resilient society that leaves no one behind and thus addresses the needs of the most vulnerable populations, including poor communities in rural, coastal and flood-prone areas, drought-prone areas, char and haor areas. We need to ensure that Low Carbon Development Strategies are included in manifestos. The manifestos must ensure coral friendly national infrastructure development plans, safeguarding reefs as well as people, while building national prosperity and securing our long-term survival.

- 10. To inspire action on the SDGs, we will use all possible channels to bring the Malé Declaration to the attention of our colleagues and other relevant stakeholders. We pledge to continue our cooperation, strengthen our commitment and share our experiences at the fifth South Asian Speakers' Summit on Achieving the SDGs. We thus revive the South Asia Speakers Forum on the SDGs to be chaired yearly by the host Speaker of our Summit, who will work with the IPU in monitoring the recommendations of the Summit.**
11. The Summit hopes that the IPU will continue to promote parliamentary engagement with the SDGs and continue to work with the United Nations and other relevant partners towards their successful implementation.