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Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

Speech by the IPU President, Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, on the occasion of the Third World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development

"Combating Inequality through Social and Financial Inclusion"

Bali, Indonesia, 4 September 2019

"Promoting equality must be a priority for our governments. The commitment to peace goes through the path of social justice."

Chair of the Indonesian House Steering Committee,

Mr. Bambang Soesatyo, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia,

Mr. Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia,

In the final years of the last century, four key themes emerged from the collective concerns and aspirations of the world's peoples: peace, freedom, development and the environment.

The Brundtland Commission's report briefly defined sustainable development as the ability to make development sustainable, to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Using that definition has led many to see sustainable development as having a major focus on inter-generational equity. However, the definition does not give any indications about how sustainable development can be achieved.

In 2015, the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals in order to address challenges related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace and justice.

We have overcome many challenges but there is more work to be done. Without empirical data regarding the current global situation, it is not possible to trace our path with confidence towards the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Poverty is one of the most important obstacles to overcome when we talk about equality in the world; fighting poverty corresponds to Sustainable Development Goal 1.

Although extreme poverty has decreased since 1990, the worst forms of poverty persist.

The latest global estimate from 2013 suggested that 11 per cent of the world's population of 7.8 billion people lived below the threshold of extreme poverty.

The proportion of the world's workers living with their families on under US\$ 1.90 per person a day declined significantly in the last two decades, falling from 26.9 per cent in 2000 to 9.2 per cent in 2017.

In Asia and the Pacific, though poverty reduction has been quite significant, this region remains home to the largest number of the world's poor. More than one in four people in Asia and the Pacific's developing countries experience poverty in multiple dimensions, including additional deprivations that impact their health, education and standard of living.

Furthermore, hunger points to the deep inequality around the globe and unfortunately is on the rise again: the proportion of people suffering from malnutrition increased from 10.6 per cent in 2015 to 11 per cent in 2016. This represents an increase to 815 million people in the world in 2016 compared to 777 million in 2015.

In 2017, 151 million children under the age of five suffered low height for their age. 51 million were underweight and 38 million were overweight. In the case of the Asia-Pacific region, almost half a billion people were malnourished.

Talk about hunger naturally leads us to health issues.

Globally, from 2000 to 2016, the mortality rate of children under five fell by 47 per cent and the neonatal mortality rate fell by 39 per cent. During this same period, the number of deaths of children under five decreased from 9.9 million to 5.6 million.

In the Asia-Pacific region, in 2015, around 85,000 women died in cases related to pregnancy or childbirth. Up to 90 per cent of those deaths could have been prevented through quality antenatal, obstetric and perinatal care, including care given by midwives and skilled birth attendants. In the absence of such care, the average maternal mortality rate in the region is extremely high, at 127 per 100,000 live births, compared to the developed-country average of just 12 per 100,000. Also, 9 of every 10 maternal deaths occur in just 12 countries in this region.

Another topic related to the achievement of equality is education. Worldwide, the participation rate in primary education during early childhood was 70 per cent in 2016, showing an increase from 63 per cent in 2010. The lowest rates are found in sub-Saharan Africa with 41 per cent and North Africa and western Asia with 52 per cent.

It is estimated that, of the 617 million children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age, 58 per cent do not achieve the minimum levels of reading and math proficiency. This represents an obstacle to securing equal education and decent opportunities for all.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, equal and sustainable world.

Currently, one in five women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report having experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Today, 49 countries have no laws protecting women from domestic violence.

On the other hand, worldwide female representation in the lower or single chamber of parliament increased from 19 per cent in 2010 to 23 per cent in 2018.

Despite this, the Asia-Pacific region has some of the poorest development indicators for women and girls. Deep-rooted gender inequality and discriminatory norms and practices reinforce patriarchal systems. Women in the region also have the lowest rates of political participation and suffer from a high prevalence of gender-based violence. Those harmful practices, and so many others, reinforce gender inequality across not only the region but the whole world.

As has been said, about the half world's population still lives on the equivalent of about 2 US dollars a day, with a global unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent.

Although the situation in Asia and the Pacific is a little better, with 4.2 per cent unemployment, it is important to keep promoting sustainable economic growth in this area to reduce this rate further.

Concentrating efforts on policies and legal frameworks that allow economic inclusion will not only produce financial growth but also allow social growth in regions that require it.

Another factor preventing the consolidation of an equal world is crimes related to human trafficking.

While there has been significant progress in tackling homicide and trafficking cases over the past decade, there are still thousands of people at great risk in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

70 per cent of detected victims of human trafficking are women and girls, most of them for sexual exploitation.

All this data gives us clarity about the challenges we need to tackle immediately.

One of the first steps towards protecting individual rights and providing equal circumstances for all is the implementation of worldwide birth registration and the creation of more independent national human rights institutions around the world.

Also, to reduce inequality, policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people. Providing them with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.