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## Speech by Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, IPU President

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It is an honour to be here today, taking part in this important meeting and addressing an issue that is absolutely crucial, not only to the Inter-Parliamentary Union but to humanity as a whole: namely, the UN's 2030 Agenda.

Back in 2015, our governments adopted this Development Agenda in the General Assembly of the United Nations and it is made up of goals and objectives. Now, this is the most ambitious project that humanity has ever undertaken. What we're trying to do is look at how we can create a truly inclusive planet, a world that truly leaves no one behind. We have ten years now to save the planet and five years ago this agenda seemed very difficult to achieve but now, five years later, we realise that it is an imperative. We need to roll up our sleeves and get down to work.

Now, we can talk a great deal about the commitments that we entered into by signing up to Agenda 2030 and yes, it is quite true, we have an important role to play in our law-making work, so we not only need to pass new laws, but make sure that we enforce existing laws, because in many of our countries, we have many laws, which continue to be discriminatory against women, against children, against immigrants, and this is in the 21st century. Our legal systems are not inclusive. Now, above and beyond our law-making functions, which you know, I think we do what it says on the tin, if you like, we are lawmakers, but we have to go beyond that.

Now, in my own country, a lot of us tend to say that truly you've got to look at the budget, because if your priority is not budgeted for, then your priority simply doesn't exist. And that is why it is absolutely crucial that the Sustainable Development Agenda be incorporated in the international budgets and we need to keep a watchful eye and make sure that it is.

We also need to ensure, in our parliaments, that we work with the government to implement this Agenda but at the same time we are able to call our governments to account. So what we do is walk hand in hand with one another, but we keep in the back of our minds our very important role in performing oversight. And we need to ensure that we have a space for cooperation as well as for calling the governments to account and demanding that they deliver; that is all part of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Now, one of the biggest assets of our parliaments, and one of the biggest assets of parliamentary diplomacy

– unlike traditional diplomacy, where you hear just the voices of governments and the voices of majorities – is the fact that parliaments are where both representatives of both majorities and minorities come together. So different political ways of thinking and different sections of the community can have their voices reflected because they then have to go home to make sure that international commitments

are then transformed into local action.

What we have to do now is look at where the SDGs are being most effectively implemented. We have to join together in working to further all of the goals in Agenda 2030 because there are many challenges that we still face in Europe; 12, 13 and 14 are the SDGs that have to do with our responsibilities in terms of consumption, production with climate change, as well as caring for our oceans. But at the same time, there are other objectives, where we have very good indicators, for example, in fighting poverty. But there is no part of the world where those objectives are being truly achieved, and this is where parliamentarians come in.

And this leads me onto a second thought that I would like to share with you and that is that we need a more equal and inclusive planet, precisely because that is the best way of nurturing and nourishing our democracies.

Now, much is done in the way of getting our parliaments and democracies to listen more to citizens. Societies are undergoing rapid change and if we do not change our models of governance, if we do not make sure that parliaments become spaces in which we genuinely listen to what people are clamouring for, then it's going to be extremely difficult for us to make the changes that we need for our planet.

These days, politicians – and parliamentarians in particular – bear particular responsibility and it may be that people think that democracy and human rights can be taken for granted, that they've been achieved once and for all. But, here, in the 21st century, the fact of the matter is that democracy and human rights have not been 100 percent achieved in all countries and in all regions.

There are many countries that believe that we can continue to forge ahead with the same strategies of the past century. We've got discrimination, we've got nationalism, we've got political and racist nationalisms, and we are now starting to see – as the United Nations next year will be celebrating important anniversaries – just how important multilateralism still is.

But we have to try and offer new content to our multilateralism. We need to look at the local level, look at the quality of representatives at a time in which we need to explain what multilateralism is to people back home. But, as parliamentarians, there is still a great deal that we can do and there in the Inter-Parliamentary Union, we have worked very hard, first of all, to generate awareness of the need for this Agenda and, secondly, to make sure that people have the information they need to implement it at national level.

So, let me stress this point: you can't simply talk about the planet without thinking about how you implement these goals on the ground. So, we carried out a survey in the Inter-Parliamentary Union asking national parliaments how they were participating in their countries' voluntary projects. And, out of all the countries we asked, we only got about 89 replies. Forty-seven parliaments were taking part along with their countries in the process of revising the implementation of the SDGs, but there were only 16 of the 47 who were taking part in any significant degree. And this means, therefore, that generally speaking, parliaments are simply not involved in the Sustainable Development Agenda. How can we change that? How can we make sure that parliaments are the ones to strike, not only international but also local agreements?

We have a saying whereby this Agenda really needs to be in the hearts of people. So above and beyond are budgets and our parliamentary systems, and above and beyond our oversight, it is important that we talk about the Agenda in our parliaments. It is not something that can be left solely to the executive, and I continue

to stress the point that if we continue to see discrimination and inequality then nothing – nothing – is going to change in any of our countries.

I would like to highlight the importance of the fact that we are representatives because parliaments, after all, are a forum in which we represent people. We love to say that parliaments can act as a forum for all voices, but there are many people that we are leaving behind, in reality. In fact, we are leaving most of the planet behind.

First of all, you've got people under the age of 30, who make up more than half of our global population. But, if you were to extrapolate from that figure and you were to have the proportion of those young people in our parliaments and you were to contrast that with the two percent that they account for right now. So, you can see that our parliaments are not properly representing all of our populations, and the same is true for the 50 percent that our gender accounts for.

So, it's not good for women, it's not good for young people. And that is why, when we, in our region, look to Europe, then we see that 29.3 percent of parliamentarians are women, and 3.9 percent are young people under the age of 30. So, we look at those figures in Europe, but if you look at the global average, then you realise that there are only ten countries, anywhere in the world, that actually have gender parity.

Let me remind you that our planet is made up of two genders. We do have parity on the planet, so that is why we have to look at quotas for women as well as quotas for young people, because this is the reality and we have to change our systems and we have to make sure that more women can get into parliament. We also have to change the law, because two out of three countries do not even allow young people under the age of 30 to stand for parliament in the first place. They are allowed to vote and they are allowed to get married, but there are all kinds of important decisions in their lives that they are excluded from. That is why we need better representation for young people in our parliaments.

Finally, the Sustainable Development Agenda has to be a place of unity, where all voices come together calling on governments. We're talking about representation across the board so that we can drive forward the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Now, when we're talking about multilateralism, I think that we would all wish to defend it as it is undergoing a crisis and its institutions, such as this one, which brings so many people around the same table, is the prime place so as to do so.

Multilateralism has made significant achievements and we have, of course, had to overcome the devastation of both the First and the Second World Wars, but despite those achievements, we are seeing these days, a lot of backsliding and we are hearing many political leaders trying to do away with multilateralism. However, Europe has done very well in the past in terms of implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda, and so, yes, you are doing okay when it comes to representation of women and young people, and it's important to recognise that although you're on the right path, you must not allow any backsliding.

That is why it is absolutely crucial that we do push forward cooperation policies because when you look at the global situation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda overall – and Europe can sometimes be seen as an isolated unit that tends to notch up better indicators than other regions of the world – but Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to work together as parliamentarians to make sure that these very good results can be replicated on other latitudes and that is why I hope, on the basis of such interesting discussions amongst

parliamentarians, we can continue to work together in a coordinated way, with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and with real resolve and determination.

And I am only the second woman to have presided over the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 130 years and that is why it is so important that we join together in trying to eliminate sexual harassment of women in our parliaments. Parliaments are, of course, the home of democracy, and we must put an end to all forms of discrimination and violence against women wherever that might be, once and for all.

Thank you very much.