

## **Keynote Address**

**Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme**

**2020 Annual IPU/UN Parliamentary Hearing on the theme: Education as a key to peace and sustainable development: toward the implementation of SDG4**

### **“Realizing the SDGs is the only way forward”**

- President of the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, Mr Tijjani Muhammad-Bande; representatives of the delegations of member states. Honorable presiding officers and members of parliaments, congresses, and assemblies. Secretaries-general; clerks; and parliamentary staff. President of the Inter-parliamentary Union, Ms Gabriela Cuevas Barron; Secretary-General, Mr Martin Chungong; Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations, Ms Patricia Torsney; and members of the IPU Secretariat. United Nations system colleagues; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen: Greetings.
- Last June, the IPU marked its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The IPU was born in 1889 from the initiative of two parliamentarians, William Randal Cremer of the United Kingdom, and Frédéric Passy, of France. Both were convinced of the role that parliamentarians could play in promoting democracy and peace through dialogue, which they saw as two closely inter-linked actions.
- This June, we will mark the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. Its premise - that ensuring respect for human rights and creating the conditions for sustainable human development are fundamental preconditions for maintaining global peace and security – was in many ways anticipated by the thinking of Messrs Cremer and Passy.
- It should therefore come as no surprise that the United Nations and its instrumentalities, and the Inter-parliamentary Union, co-operate fruitfully on many issues.
- One instance of this collaboration is this Annual IPU/UN Parliamentary Hearing. In 2004, the General Assembly referred to the Annual Hearing as a “regular feature” of its own proceedings, having two years previously granted the IPU Permanent Observer status.

- In 2015, the IPU made effective use of that status, in partnership with the UN, civil society, and member states, during the creation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to help ensure that the vital work of national parliaments in achieving the Agenda was recognized. The result of those efforts is reflected in the 2030 Declaration, calling attention to your essential roles as parliamentarians in lawmaking, approval of national budgets, and oversight of the activities of government departments and agencies.
- In that same Declaration, world leaders committed “to providing inclusive and equitable quality education for all”. In doing so they re-affirmed the international legal norm set out in Art 26 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, repeated in Art 13 International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights - that quality education is a fundamental human right.
- Education, though, is so much more than a fundamental human right: it is a key precondition for, and enabler of, participation in society. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau knew this. He titled what he saw as the "best and most important" of all his writings, “Emile” or “on Education” - in French, “Émile, ou De l'Éducation”. Rousseau believed that the education of children should be derived less from books and more from the child's interactions with the world. Today, he might have said: educate children to be “global citizens”. Nelson Mandela had a similar view, declaring that “(e)ducation is the most powerful weapon to change the world”.
- World leaders also incorporated this instrumental view of the transformative power of education into the 2030 Declaration. It speaks to the need for everyone, especially the most vulnerable, to have “access to life-long learning opportunities that help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society”.
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 is the result, with its call to “(e)nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.
- The fundamental importance of SDG4 as a key enabler of the 2030 Agenda was recently underlined by UNDP’s 2019 Human Development Report (HDR), which explores in detail contemporary manifestations of inequality, and the complex ways in which those manifestations obstruct development.

- The HDR reinforces that inequality can no longer be understood in terms of how much someone earns compared to their neighbour. Properly understood, it is much more about the unequal distribution of wealth and power; the entrenched social and political norms that are bringing people onto the streets in cities and towns across the world; and the triggers that will do so in the future - unless something changes. These horizontal inequalities are the real challenges we must all understand and overcome if we are to build a more just and inclusive future for all.
- The Report demonstrates that, just as millions more people have what are considered the basics for a dignified life, the capacities that people will need to thrive – now and in the future - have changed. Comprehensive access to tertiary education, and to broadband, was once considered a luxury. This, of course, is no longer the case: to achieve structural transformation, reap population dividends, and achieve the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, developing societies will require access to home-grown, high-quality advice and expertise, and the means to rapidly communicate and apply it.
- Yet in countries with very high human development, subscriptions to fixed broadband are growing 15 times faster than in countries with low human development. Only 3.2% of adults in low human development countries have a tertiary education, compared with 29% in developed countries, and the proportion of adults with tertiary education in the latter is growing more than 6 times faster than in the former.
- The 2019 HDR's findings on the importance of overcoming inequalities in access to education are reinforced by earlier studies which highlight the profound effects that education has on people's lives. A flagship IMF report in 2017<sup>1</sup> It found that, in advanced economies, males with tertiary education live up to 14 years longer on average than those with a secondary education or lower.
- Efforts to achieve SDG4 are increasingly urgent, then, especially in the context of meeting emerging inequalities in education and access to technology.
- In 2019, SDG4 was one of the Sustainable Development Goals reviewed in detail during the Voluntary National Review (VNR) Process at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Sadly,

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<sup>1</sup> IMF Fiscal Monitor, 2017

analysis of and extrapolation from the 2019 VNRs<sup>2</sup> indicates that we are not on track to achieve the goal:

- Despite considerable progress on education access and participation over the past years, 262 million children and young people aged 6 to 17 were still out of school in 2017, and more than half the world's children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.
  - Rapid technological changes present opportunities and challenges, but the learning environment, the capacities of teachers, and the quality of education have not kept pace. Refocused efforts are needed to improve learning outcomes for the full life cycle, especially for women, girls, and marginalized people in vulnerable settings.
  - In 2015, an estimated 617 million children and adolescents of primary and lower secondary school age worldwide – more than 50% – were not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. Of these, about two thirds were either attending school but were not learning in the classroom, or had simply dropped out school.
  - Some 750 million adults – two thirds of them women – remained illiterate in 2016. Half of the global illiterate population lives in South Asia, and a quarter lives in sub-Saharan Africa.
  - Many developing countries still lack basic infrastructure and facilities to provide effective learning environments. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the biggest challenges: at the primary and lower secondary levels, fewer than half of schools have access to electricity, broadband, computers, and drinking water.
  - Globally, there has been little progress in the percentage of primary school teachers who are trained: it has been stagnating at about 85% since 2015. The proportion is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, at 64%.
- Member states, civil society, business, and the multilateral system have much work still to do – on SDG4 and otherwise - as we embark on this first year of the Decade for Action to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

achieve the 2030 Agenda. We must lift all our levels of ambition, investment, and achievement.

- Honorable members, dear colleagues: what, then, should we now ask of you in this regard?
- The Global Goals are complex and inter-related. SDG4 is not the only key enabling goal of the 2030 Agenda. There are others, especially the one with which I am sure you are most familiar. SDG16 calls for peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; with access to justice for all; and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Indeed, it is often referred to as “the parliamentarians’ goal”.
- The targets and indicators of SDG16 make clear that only instrumentalities of the nation state bearing the hallmarks of inclusiveness, effectiveness, and accountability can ever be fit for purpose to deliver the other 16 goals.
- The linkages between SDGs 4 and 16 are immediately apparent. The best educational outcomes are seen in peaceful, safe, and socially equal environments; and are best delivered by effective, accountable and inclusive educational institutions. In turn - as our research on the prevention of violent extremism has demonstrated - comprehensive, quality, lifelong education for women and men is critical to ensure and sustain a culture of peace, justice and inclusion<sup>3</sup>.
- SDG16 was another of the global goals reviewed in depth at last year’s HLPF. As with SDG4, and despite many encouraging examples of improvement and innovation in governance, the full vision of SDG16 remains a mere aspiration for most of the world’s citizens.
  - On effectiveness, 80% of the global poor still live in countries without fully-functional institutions for service delivery.
  - On inclusion, of countries that track gender parity in public administration, only 20% have so far reached gender parity in decision-making positions<sup>4</sup>, and only 24.3% of the world’s parliamentarians are women<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/people/gender-equality/gender-equality-in-public-administration.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

- And on accountability, only half the world's parliaments - the entities which must provide the forum where national institutions should account for their effective and inclusive delivery – report regular debate concerning the achievement of SDG-aligned development goals<sup>6</sup>.
- It has never been more important for parliaments and parliamentarians to use all the tools at your disposal to push for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, to ensure that no-one is left behind, and to insist that those most at risk of being left behind are reached first by government service delivery.
- Honorable members, dear colleagues, now is the time to redouble your own efforts, including as follows:
  - require ministers and senior officials to participate in regular, systematic, public hearings on progress to meet your country's SDG-aligned national development plan in all areas, including education.
  - under the standing orders and rules of procedure of your institutions, through interpellations and questions to ministers, and in partnership with civil society, bring the SDGs – including SDG4 - to the attention of the public and the media, encouraging a cycle and culture of accountability.
  - consider, encourage, and adopt innovations in the use of data and technology to enhance accountability and transparency, and to improve service-delivery.
  - continually search for better ways of interacting with those you represent.
  - where your powers and ways of working are not adequate to hold your governments to account for SDG achievement, ask your partners – including IPU and UNDP – to provide technical assistance and opportunities for knowledge exchange on how to ensure better SDG fitness for purpose.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2019-07/new-ipu-data-reveals-challenges-parliaments-in-sdg-implementation>

- Our world faces unprecedented global challenges. Climate disruption, growing inequalities, the fourth industrial revolution, the sixth mass extinction, mass migration, and violent extremism all demand solutions beyond the capabilities of any single country, bloc or organization.
- The SDGs recognize the scale of the problems we face. And they represent the only global blueprint available to resolve them.
- I have no doubt that if Jean Jacques Rousseau were here today, he would have rewritten his phenomenal magnum opus, on the Social Contract, re-titling it “The SDGs are the only way forward!” They indeed represent the new Global Social Contract.
- Yet only 10 years remain for their attainment. And as we have seen, we are well behind on progress, especially on key enabling goals such as SDG4 and SDG16.
- As the IPU enters its 131<sup>st</sup> year, and the UN its 75<sup>th</sup>, let us therefore recommit – at this 2020 annual parliamentary IPU/UN hearing – to make those remaining 10 years count.
- Honorable members, dear colleagues: realizing the SDGs is indeed the only way forward.