



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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# Speech by the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Martin Chungong

Justice for Africa's Children  
UNGA Event

New York, 20 September 2022

Dear Kailash, Stefan and Leymah,

Dear friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here with you today. I would like to renew my warm thanks to Laureates and Leaders for Children, as well as the Kailash Satyarthi Foundation for Children, for involving the IPU in their mobilization for the worthy cause of justice for children, especially in Africa. Let me take this opportunity to assure you of the unwavering support of the global parliamentary community in promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

We have a duty to pass on a society in good condition to the children of today: the next generation and the spearhead of tomorrow's society.

There is an urgent need to take action against injustice and its consequences. Following the disastrous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of African children do not have access to basic health care, and in particular to vaccines to protect them against COVID-19. The pandemic has also served to remind us of the persistence of inequalities and discrimination of all kinds, as well as issues that undermine people's full enjoyment of human rights in general and child rights in particular.

As for the specific issue of child labour, I could not agree with you more that this is a consequence of poverty which is becoming endemic. We all concur that the situation is worrying, though not yet desperate. The growing challenges we are facing in this respect are undermining our efforts to lift our people out of poverty. As if that were not enough, the war in Ukraine adds a layer of complexity to the current challenging context. The food crisis, one of the results of this conflict with already perceptible consequences, is compromising efforts aimed at lifting our populations, especially the most marginalized, out of poverty. We are all well aware of the ramifications of these crises, which include the interruption of children's education in the most deprived families; the enlistment of children in all kinds of trafficking, including child labour; breaches of trust between public officials and the population; and a sense of abandonment, which in turn fuels distrust, a potential source of chronic instability we know all too well.

Over the past ten years, we have implemented a number of initiatives that sought to support parliamentary actions on the ground including the West African region where child labour is increasing. These activities focus on targeted parliamentary action aimed at bringing about legislative reforms that would create an environment hostile to child labour, allocate sufficient resources for the implementation and monitoring of the implementation of relevant programmes and policies.

Since the impact of implemented measures must be assessed on the ground, and upon the request of the National Assembly of Benin, the IPU will conduct a workshop aiming at providing Beninese parliamentarians with the necessary tools to eradicate

child labour. Other actors including representatives of the executive, the judiciary, and civil society will join that workshop.

In the same vein, the IPU plan to organize together with Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, and in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, an awareness-raising campaign among the parliamentarians of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) during the first half of December this year.

In view of everything I have said, it is our responsibility to do our utmost to eradicate the scourges of poverty, and child labour – which jeopardize the development of children and therefore socioeconomic development more broadly, undermining the basis of a strong, resilient and sustainable society.

From this point of view, I would like to reiterate that parliaments should be in the driving seat for the robust actions required to fight against poverty and build an environment conducive to social justice in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, for which the countdown has already started. In that same view, I am pleased to inform you that, together with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), we are promoting child-friendly parliaments, which we believe should pave the way and further facilitate parliaments' ownership of child rights.

Let me share with you the following actions that should be undertaken in line with the topic under discussion:

- We must engage in deep reflection on measures to promote renewed social justice, articulated around the values of living together, equal opportunities and rights, and resilience. This re-designed social justice should be accompanied by mechanisms to ensure the reduction of inequalities, and promotion of the equitable redistribution of wealth and the benefits of economic growth;
- We need to strengthen the legislative framework against child labour and combine related parliamentary actions with those of other actors, including the executive. Only harmonized and holistic actions will put an end to this scourge. Let me stress here the critical aspect of monitoring that will help to follow closely the development of the situation, and to adjust strategy should need be;
- We must scale up social protection systems, which should facilitate children's access to basic care including health, proper education and apprenticeships.
- It is imperative to contain inflation, which, in conjunction with recession, is sowing fear in the international community. To this end, targeted actions should be undertaken with various stakeholders with a view to stabilizing prices while rebalancing supply and demand.
- We must strengthen the food assistance provided to the most disadvantaged populations, which had already begun as part of the measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with Goal 2 of the SDGs, Zero Hunger, additional efforts are required *to feed the 795 million people – including children in developing and least developed countries – currently suffering from hunger and the 2 billion additional people expected by 2050<sup>1</sup>*. We must understand that a race against time has now begun.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate to you my pledge of the IPU's support for any initiatives aimed at reaching your noble objective.

I thank you for your attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Development Goals