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Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson President of the IPU

Parliamentary Forum at the 2025 HLPF
Opening session

New York, 22 July 2025

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Parliamentary Forum at the HLPF – the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

For those of you who are new to this event, let me start by saying that this is the one big opportunity we get, each year, to make our parliamentary voices heard at the UN with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation.

We are here together with our ministers and other government representatives to take stock of progress as well as setbacks on the SDGs, whose expiration year of 2030 is fast approaching. We are also here to strengthen our political resolve to advance the goals and to hold our governments accountable. We are here to share our experiences and to learn from each other.

Unfortunately, the outlook for the SDGs remains disheartening.

Not even 20 percent of the SDGs targets are on track globally. While quite a number of countries are progressing well on many goals, not one country is set to achieve all of the goals by 2030.

The UN estimates that some 4 trillion dollars is needed each year to get the job done. This is not an impossible amount in a global economy of 100 trillion dollars. And yet very little is being done to fulfil aid commitments, find a sustainable solution to the growing debt problem, impose more progressive taxes, reform the global financial system, and other such actions that can help propel the SDGs forward.

I know this may sound a bit like a numbers game. But it is not.

Behind these numbers there are countless lives impacted, in the most dramatic way for those having to go hungry and homeless, or the less dramatic but totally disempowering example of being paid less than the male colleague next to you, just because you are a woman.

What is most appalling to me is the time and money being wasted while this most important agenda is languishing. As we all know, conflict is one of the main reasons why the SDGs are falling behind.

Some 50 countries are in conflicts that should never have arisen or should have been resolved long ago; and major economies are squandering trillions of dollars in military budgets, ostensibly to protect themselves from foreign enemies.

How about investing in diplomacy and dialogue as a much cheaper and more successful alternative?

You'll be surprised to know that the biggest threat to our national security does not come from the outside: it comes from the inside. It consists of the *human insecurity* that too many people live with right at home in their own countries, and which is the breeding ground for all kinds of grievances.

It is often those same grievances that drive social unrest and political tensions. Having said all this, let me also express a note of optimism.

Those countries that are taking the SDGs seriously *are* showing progress, and this demonstrates the old adage that where there is a will there is a way.

Globally, child mortality rates have continued to fall, access to electricity and the internet has expanded, and many countries have improved school enrolment and literacy rates.

Innovations in technology, financing and partnerships are helping to advance sustainable agriculture, renewable energy and access to healthcare.

Today's meeting will focus on just two of the SDGs that are under review at this year's HLPF: SDG 3, on good health and wellbeing, and SDG 5, on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

These goals happen to be priority goals for the IPU as well, so I am particularly happy that we will have an opportunity to discuss them in depth today.

SDG 3 and 5 have in common their requirement for what we call a whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach.

Achieving better health outcomes is not just about investing in doctors and hospitals, as important as that is. It is about tackling the social and economic determinants of disease, which include bad diets, low levels of education, pollution, stress, and so much more.

Likewise, achieving gender equality requires a multi-prong approach that includes many actions at once, such as combating gender-based discrimination, electing more women to parliament, ensuring work and education opportunities for women, and preventing sexual harassment.

As a global leader, I am particularly worried about SDG 5 as it is the goal that is most off track. How can this be, when, as we all know, gender equality holds the key to unleashing so many other development forces?

Imagine, for example, the economic benefits to the whole of society, and not just to women, if they were paid for their care work, if they were allowed to own property everywhere, if they didn't have to marry when they were too young, and if they were paid a fair wage.

Colleagues,

The SDGs are at the centre of the IPU's development work, aiming at strengthening parliamentary capacities for oversight and legislation. Our latest effort in this regard is a toolkit entitled ***SDG-informed legislative scrutiny***.

This toolkit, dear colleagues, provides step-by-step guidelines for aligning legislation with the SDGs, setting monitoring goals, and enhancing communication within and beyond the walls of parliament. It includes checklists for SDG-based legislative scrutiny, as well as case studies illustrating how legislation on issues like poverty or climate action can connect with broader SDG targets to address diverse needs.

Another important initiative we are taking to promote parliamentary oversight of the SDGs revolves around the national progress reports – known as VNRs (Voluntary National Reviews) – which some 40 countries present to the HLPF each year.

We support this process with a *survey of parliamentary engagement in the VNRs*, in which the parliaments of participating countries let us know the extent to which they are able to participate in the consultative process.

Past surveys showed limited parliamentary engagement, with only about a third of parliaments contributing to these national reports. The results of this year's survey will be published in September. I hope you will all be able to look at them.

With only five years left for the SDGs and issues like climate change and inequality getting out of control, every day we devote our minds to this agenda can make a difference.

The IPU, on its part, will continue to do all it can to support all of you, all of your parliaments.

I wish you a productive discussion.

Thank you for listening.