



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Statement

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Global Parliamentary Summit against
Hunger and Malnutrition

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Excellencies,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to address this distinguished gathering on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). As the President of the global organization of parliaments, I truly appreciate the opportunity to reiterate our strong commitment on nutrition at the highest level, and I wish to congratulate you on a well-designed program that is filled with promising discussions on policies, frameworks and recommendations to improve nutrition for all people. It is also an honour to be able to address you on this first summit.

I am also pleased to see that this event counts with the presence of over 45 parliamentarians from my region, Latin America. We must remember that our region accomplished its goal of reducing hunger by half; however, it is also true that in the latest FAO report from late 2017, it was established that levels of hunger increased once again, particularly due to migration and conflict, natural disasters and climate change. Evidently, hunger and malnutrition are still considerable regional challenges.

Malnutrition and diet are by far the biggest risk factors for the global burden of disease, affecting one in three people in the world and posing a serious public health challenge to every country. Almost one in four children under the age of five years globally is affected by chronic malnutrition, hampering children's health, well-being and long-term development. At the same time, the number of overweight children and obesity in adults is increasing rapidly, including in low and middle income countries, leading to diet-related non-communicable diseases that cause 70% of global deaths. It is also important to note that these increases in obesity are closely related to the fact that the access to healthy nutrition is becoming more difficult, as the most expensive food items are the ones that are harder to come by; this way, fruits or vegetables become more expensive, while food that is unhealthy becomes increasingly affordable.

As you all know, nutrition and food security are eminently political issues. No change for the better will be felt until these issues are prioritized, adequately funded and carefully implemented. Parliamentarians hold the key to the solutions.

By virtue of their constitutional powers, parliaments and parliamentarians can influence laws and policies to improve the lives of their citizens. This includes addressing the major nutrition challenges that our societies currently face. While it is true that the Executive branches of our countries implement public policies regarding these issues, it is clear that national parliaments act as a counterbalance, as it is our duty to ensure that rules and laws devised to combat hunger and malnutrition become binding.

Parliaments hold national governments accountable through their oversight function. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians have an important advocacy mission in their communities. They are the bridge between the people and the government. Last but not least, parliaments hold the power of the purse.

If fully discharged, these critical functions can ensure that parliaments and parliamentarians use their powers in the most effective way and where there is greatest need.

It is in this spirit that the IPU encourages parliaments to take action for improved food security and nutrition in their countries. Our initiatives have helped establish important fora in a number of countries to promote multistakeholder cooperation with inclusion and input from parliaments. I am pleased to inform you that as a result of this action further work is going on in 36 countries on important issues of legislation and financing of nutrition and food security initiatives.

The IPU is also pleased that its partnership with FAO keeps growing strong. Our two organizations are working closely to develop a handbook to support parliamentarians overcoming barriers and putting in place the necessary legislative framework to achieve nutrition and food security. By informing the decisions and actions of parliamentarians for healthy diets and improved nutrition, this tool will help strengthen parliaments' engagement to realize the rights to food and to health, and to deliver on sustainable development.

At the global level, the IPU Assemblies have served as an avenue for discussion and peer learning on different issues concerning nutrition and food security. For instance, during the IPU Assembly in Dhaka in April 2017, parliamentarians from all over the world approved an emergency item on *Urgent international action to save millions of people from famine and drought in parts of Africa and Yemen* that reaffirmed, among other things, access to food as a basic human right. More recently, at the last IPU Assembly that just concluded its work in Geneva, there was an important debate about legislative and budgetary measures to address malnutrition in all its forms. It was jointly organized, among others, with FAO, to facilitate exchanges of experiences and lessons learned among parliamentarians. It informed of different practices to deal with malnutrition and find solutions, stressing in particular the importance of political will and inclusive partnerships to ensure that people are not left behind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Sustainable Development Goals offer the opportunity for parliaments and parliamentarians to confirm their ongoing relevance by delivering on the well-being of the people. The SDGs have enshrined the objective of "ending all forms of malnutrition," challenging the world to think and act differently on malnutrition—to focus on all its facets and work to end it, for all people, by 2030. This ambition can only be fulfilled if food systems become sustainable, so that food supplies are stable and all people have access to adequate nutrition and health.

However, many governments lack the resources or the political will to guarantee adequate nutrition and food systems. It is in this intersection between nutrition, food security and governance that the role of parliament comes into play, bringing enormous value.

First, parliaments and parliamentarians can advocate at various levels to elevate nutrition and food security to the top of national agendas with a view to tackling inequalities, strengthening national food systems and making sure that special attention is paid to the populations most in need.

Secondly, through their legislative and oversight powers, parliaments can and should make sure that national and international commitments are turned into action. Evidence has shown that improvement in food security and nutrition is principally due to the implementation of policies, programs and frameworks that are anchored in legislation.

Thirdly, nutrition is dependent on many factors that fall outside of the nutrition sector. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a strong platform for parliaments to promote multisector coordination and policy coherence to tackle the underlying determinants of malnutrition, such as poverty, food security, education, care for mothers and children, and primary healthcare services and sanitation.

The outcome of your debate today and tomorrow will be very important in taking forward parliamentary action on food security and nutrition.

Ladies and gentlemen, please accept my best wishes for successful deliberations.