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Speech by Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change
Conference (COP25)

Madrid (Spain), 10 December 2019

Hon. Ms. Meritxell Batet, Speaker of the Congress of Deputies,
Hon. Ms. Cristina Narbona, Vice Speaker of the Senate,
Mr. Martin Frick, Senior Director of Policy and Programme Coordination UNFCCC
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to address you at the beginning of this important international parliamentary meeting. I am very pleased to be here in Madrid with you today and to welcome you all to this meeting on behalf of the IPU.

Let me start by thanking the Spanish Parliament for the wonderful work done in organizing this meeting at a very short notice and for receiving us with such warm hospitality. Spain is one of the founding members of the IPU. We are grateful for their longstanding contribution to our organization and look forward to our continued collaboration.

This year, the IPU celebrates its 130th anniversary. 130 years of working for peace, reconciliation, human rights and equality, and more than a decade of working with parliamentarians on the pressing issue of climate change, which is of course why we find ourselves here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The IPU Parliamentary Meetings on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conferences provide an opportunity for the parliamentarians all over the world to work together to effectively engage with the challenges of our changing climate. Your presence here sends a strong message about your commitment, and the commitment of your parliaments, to address climate change. IPU is proud to facilitate exchanges of good practices and experiences among parliamentarians at all levels in order to inspire action and maximize the contribution of parliaments to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement.

The preamble of the Paris Agreement acknowledges that climate change is a common concern for all humankind. It is the direct result of human activities that are profoundly affecting the ecosystem as well as the fundamental human rights of people. Climate change represents one of the biggest threats to sustainable development.

Human influence on the climate system is clear and evident. Experts continue to examine how the climate will react to rising atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases over time and in the various regions of the world. What will happen if we continue producing increasing amounts of greenhouse gases? What will be the consequences for humans and for our planet?

A new UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap Report warns that unless global greenhouse gas emissions fall by 7.6 per cent each year between 2020 and 2030, the world will miss the opportunity to get on track towards the 1.5°C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.

And, going beyond 1.5°C, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned, will increase the frequency and intensity of climate impacts.

G20 nations collectively account for 78 per cent of all emissions, but only five G20 members have committed to a long-term zero emissions target.

In the short-term, developed countries will have to reduce their emissions quicker than developing countries, for reasons of fairness and equity. However, all countries will need to contribute more to collective effects. Developing countries can learn from successful efforts in developed countries; they can even leapfrog them and adopt cleaner technologies at a faster rate.

Crucially, all nations in 2020 must substantially increase ambition in their Nationally Determined Contributions, as the Paris commitments are known, and follow up with policies and strategies to implement them. Solutions are available to make meeting the Paris goals possible, but they are not being deployed fast enough or at a sufficiently large scale.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Paris Agreement signatories or ratifiers have at least one law addressing climate change or the transition to a low-carbon economy. 139 have framework laws that address climate mitigation or adaptation holistically. These form a substantial legal basis on which further action builds. The challenge now is to strengthen existing laws and ensure implementation.

A number of parliaments have declared climate change action as a priority for their engagement in strengthening and promoting environmental sustainability, and the IPU has started to assist parliaments at the national level, in partnership with UN Environment and UNFCCC. This year, workshops were held in Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Zambia to raise awareness of the issue among MPs and help identify areas of action. We look forward to continuing and further strengthening our engagement on the national level in the coming year.

At the IPU Assembly in October 2019, Member Parliaments adopted an emergency resolution addressing climate change. Amongst others, the resolution urges all Parties to implement the Paris Agreement in letter and spirit, and to invest in mitigation and adaptation resolutely and speedily.

The resolution further calls on national parliaments to urge their governments to take a leading role in effective measures to counter global warming, and raise awareness and provide extensive education on the causes and impact of climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

Urgent action is needed now. But what can parliaments and parliamentarians do?

Parliaments have a vital role to play in **fostering international cooperation** to tackle climate change. It is these and other issues which jeopardize the implementation of the climate change commitments contained in the Paris Agreement and the achievement of the SDGs.

Parliamentarians should maximize their **legislative, budgetary, and oversight functions**. They must build national ownership, transform international agendas into national laws, policies, and action plans, and hold governments accountable over their actions, or lack thereof. In order to do so, they should enhance their knowledge and strengthen partnerships to share information and best practice experiences on a regional and global scale.

Parliaments should also use their influential **societal roles as change agents** advocating for behavior change and the limitation of global warming to 1.5°C to give people and ecosystems more room to adapt and remain below relevant risk thresholds.

The time for parliaments to take stronger and more concerted action to respond to climate change is now.

Dear Fellow Parliamentarians,

Parliaments play a key role when it comes to climate change, and the IPU will continue to promote parliamentary engagement in climate change negotiations and with regard to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement. I believe that this Meeting will produce valuable take-away messages, and I encourage you to take these to your parliaments. I look forward to open and constructive debates and I wish you a very successful Meeting.