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## Speech to Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)

### *Parliamentary leadership in promoting inter and intra-regional connectivity for peace and development*

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Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you on the occasion of the meetings of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly Standing Committee on Political Affairs and the Special Committee for Creation of the Asian Parliament. I would like to start by thanking the Senate of Pakistan, for this invitation.

In this special occasion, I would like to talk about the role of parliamentary leadership in promoting inter and intra-regional connectivity for peace and development. As you may know, the promotion of peaceful resolution of conflicts via political dialogue is at the heart of IPU's work. Our distinguished 130-year history is studded with instances of the global parliamentary community working together, engaging in open dialogue, promoting ground breaking initiatives and mooted ideas that were ahead of their times.

Parliaments have a crucial role in the implementation of decisions made on the international level and in their success. I would like to mention the example of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at carrying through sustainable development to the year 2030. The IPU was actively involved in engaging parliaments on their expectations and feeding parliamentary input into the global deliberations, and now we are reaching out and working with both national parliaments and regional parliamentary organizations to make sure that appropriate national legal frameworks are put in place and that legislatures are fully engaged in the implementation of our shared Development Agenda.

Parliamentary leadership is also crucial in preventing the world from crossing the line of no return in climate change. For many years, the IPU has been calling for legislative action on climate change and risk reduction. Since 2009, it has organized parliamentary meetings at each Global Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (COPs) to increase the parliamentary contribution to global negotiations.

With catastrophic climate change threatening to hit many parts of the world in just over a decade, the IPU adopted an emergency resolution calling for decisive and urgent action on climate change at its 139<sup>th</sup> Assembly, which took place two weeks ago in Geneva. Led by a coalition of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the IPU resolution urges all parliaments to spearhead national efforts to combat climate change. It calls for IPU member parliaments to support the implementation of the 2016

Paris Agreement, included mobilizing resources and simplifying procedures for accessing climate change funding. The resolution calls for all countries to work more closely with SIDS to meet ambitious targets to mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

This is a clear example of the relevance of parliamentary leadership in promoting international cooperation for development. This resolution is evidence that all countries are equal and that by uniting efforts, the international community can move forward and face growing challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

International peace and development are directly linked to human rights and inter and intra-regional cooperation in this matter is fundamental. For parliaments to take their human rights responsibilities seriously, their individual members must be able to do their work without fear of reprisals. The work of our Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians sadly demonstrates that in many parts of the world, parliamentarians, in particular from the opposition, are at risk for merely expressing their views. Our Committee has a solid track record of protecting and offering redress to parliamentarians. In this context, parliamentary solidarity is crucial to support the work of this unique body.

Parliamentary solidarity crystalizes when parliaments or individual MPs disseminate the decisions of the Committee and urge the relevant authorities to comply with their human rights obligations. Also when parliamentary debates take place or resolutions are adopted in parliaments to support the parliamentarians whose fundamental rights are in jeopardy, or when parliamentary diplomacy is used to promote satisfactory settlement of cases before the Committee.

There is much that you can do, individually but also as a group, to help your colleagues MPs under threat.

The IPU believes that democracy has to be inclusive and that therefore women and youth should be able to make their full contribution to public decision-making. A recent study conducted by the IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) clearly illustrates the need to take action. The study shows that acts of sexism, abuse and violence against women are widespread in parliaments across Europe, with serious indicators suggesting that this situation is similar in other regions. The findings reveal that 85 per cent of women MPs have suffered from psychological violence in parliament; women MPs under 40 are more likely to be harassed; female parliamentary staff endure more sexual violence than female MPs; and that the majority of parliaments don't have mechanisms to enable women to speak out. I think you will agree that the situation is similarly grave in the other regions of the world, and that we all need to work together and do more to tackle this scourge.

As political leaders, we also need to do more to better engage young people in public life. IPU reports on youth participation in parliaments reveal that today only 1.9 per cent of MPs are under 30 while 30% of parliaments have no MPs under 30. In 73% of countries, the age to qualify as an MP is higher, sometimes much higher, than the age to vote. This is a serious gap in representation when we know that people between the ages of 20 and 44 make up 57 per cent of the world's voting age population.

Parliamentarians have a huge role to play in assuring that no one is left behind. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates this year its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." However,

more needs to be done. We need to reaffirm the urgency to ensure equal rights for women and men, to develop robust laws to combat discrimination against vulnerable groups, ensure that women and youth are duly represented in public office, and make sure that no one is left behind.

Let's take advantage of global and regional platforms for dialogue like the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly to exchange experiences, learn from each other and promote good practices. Let's take stock of existing tools and use them to reinforce our parliaments, to make parliaments more representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

Parliaments hold the key to the solutions. They 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.

Thank you.