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IPU Speech

**Ms. Margaret Mensah Williams
President, Bureau of Women
Parliamentarians**

**Parliamentary Meeting at the 62nd
session of the Commission on the
Status of Women**

New York, 13 March 2018

Madam President of the IPU,
Madam Executive Director of UN Women,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this joint IPU-UN Women parliamentary meeting entitled “Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls”.

As you all know, for many years now, UN Women and IPU have joined forces to ensure that de facto and de jure gender equality becomes a reality by engaging the parliamentary community. This yearly joint event is yet another example of our deep commitment towards reaching that goal.

In committing to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, member States recognized targets should be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society, and they endeavoured to reach first those who are furthest behind. Arguably, this global pledge, made at the highest level, to “leave no one behind” is one of the most important features of the 2030 agenda.

Nowhere is the challenge of leaving no one behind more salient than in rural areas. About 78 per cent of the world’s population in extreme poverty today lives in rural settings. On nearly every global gender and development indicator for which data is available, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men, including those related to health and education. They are also particularly affected by the impacts of climate change that can exacerbate gender inequalities in rural communities. These challenges amount to intersecting forms of discrimination, injustices and violence to which women are specifically vulnerable due to remaining prejudicial cultural practices.

That said, recognizing and analysing the special vulnerability of rural women must not lead us to their victimization, it is essential to understand they represent powerful sources, contribute significantly to agricultural production, food security and nutrition, land and natural resource management and building climate resilience. Rural women are also key to preventing and resolving crisis and poverty-related situations.

It is one of the great outcomes of the SDGs to recognize and promote these links between rural women's rights and achieving sustained, inclusive and sustainable social development.

As we said, today, across the world, rural women and girls face systemic barriers to realizing their rights. In many States, laws, national and local policies, budgets and development strategies ignore or insufficiently address their rights and needs, leading to their lack of voice in leadership and decision-making. Rural women's political empowerment is a precondition to achieving sustainable development of rural communities, which is central to the world's economic, social and environmental viability. It is hence in the interest of every State to prioritize their self-determination and participation in all levels of decision-making processes. Public policies and gender-sensitive programmes for the empowerment of rural women need to be accompanied by gender-responsive budgeting tools used in the context of aid modalities to ensure that aid contributes to the achievement of gender equality goals.

The participants in this parliamentary event are invited to share good practices developed by their parliaments to address the needs, amplify the voices, and uphold the interests of rural women and girls.

Thank you.