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South Asian Speakers' Summit on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Dhaka (Bangladesh), 30 and 31 January 2016
Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka

Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and hosted by the Bangladesh Parliament, with technical support from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

DHAKA DECLARATION ON SDG ACTION IN SOUTH ASIA

We, Speakers of Parliament from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, gathered in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 30 and 31 January 2016 for the South Asian Speakers' Summit on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Summit was convened and organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and hosted by the Bangladesh Parliament. Technical support was provided by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. We thank the IPU President for his leadership and initiative.

We discussed how the SDGs and their targets apply to our countries and the South Asian region. We considered how the Goals could advance the development of our countries. We also emphasized the important role that our parliaments play in building ownership of the Goals and in ensuring their effective implementation at the national level. As a key institution of democracy, parliaments have an important role to play in order to make the SDGs a success.

Our debates focused on five main themes: (1) The SDGs and why they matter to the region; (2) the role of parliaments in implementing the SDGs and monitoring progress towards implementation; (3) opportunities under SDG 3 (Health and Well-being); (4) the current situation regarding the tobacco epidemic and strategies to address the issue; and (5) key policies for driving down tobacco consumption in South Asia.

From the outset we recognized the critical importance of creating equal opportunities through economic growth and democratic governance in the implementation of the SDGs. We welcomed the adoption of SDG 16. Its focus on governance and effective institutions makes it a critical enabler of development.

We reiterated our commitment to build political will for the implementation of the SDGs at the national level. Building that political will should be achieved through dialogue and cooperation with key stakeholders, including citizens (men and women), civil society, community leaders and young people. Our commitment was originally expressed in the Declaration adopted in Hanoi at the 132nd IPU Assembly, as well as in the Declaration adopted in New York at the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

We believe South Asia could be a role model for the world in achieving the SDGs. Parliaments and parliamentarians have an important leadership role to play in this regard.

Parliamentary action on the SDGs is urgently needed. Practical steps need to be taken to advance the integration of the Goals at the national level and to monitor progress towards that integration. We pledge to advocate for and ensure appropriate budget allocations that will enable our countries to fully implement the SDGs.

We also recognize the interdependence and nexus between health and development. That relationship is affirmed in the SDGs as part of an ambitious, comprehensive and implementable plan of action for ending the injustices that underpin poor health and development outcomes. We agreed that parliaments should increase their efforts to ensure healthy lives and to promote well-being for everyone and at all ages. This work should include tackling the growing burden of non-communicable diseases in our countries, strengthening our implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), and recognizing the importance of its Articles 5.3 and 6.

We identified the following strategies, actions and recommendations to advance parliamentary engagement with the SDGs in our countries:

- Parliaments should **advocate for national sustainable development plans and strategies** that reflect national needs and inspire action at the local level where it matters most. Through their core functions of law making, representation and appropriation of resources through budgets and oversight, parliaments have a crucial role to play in turning the SDGs into reality.
- Parliaments should ensure that **policy and legislation support the implementation of** national sustainable development strategies. Each parliament may devise a methodology that is appropriate for its constituents in order to make laws compatible with sustainable development. Legislation should also reflect the fact that the SDGs are interlinked and not independent of each other.
- Each parliament should find effective ways to **monitor** the implementation of the SDGs. In doing so, parliaments should define frameworks through which they can assess government action at regular intervals, including the monitoring of gender mainstreaming. Parliamentary hearings, dedicated committees and plenary reports should oversee action and bring the SDGs to the attention of the public and the media. Such action will encourage accountability, transparency and ownership at all levels.
- As custodians of the public purse, the role of parliaments in **allocating resources** for a national sustainable development strategy will be critical to success. Parliaments should make sure that national commitments and sustainable development priorities are reflected in the budget and that they are gender-sensitive. This may require an entirely new approach to fiscal and tax policy, as well as incentives for more sustainable production and consumption.
- Parliaments should **rely on scientific evidence** when exercising their functions in relation to the SDGs. In so doing, they should promote the production and use of high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, in order to ensure that progress and evaluation are tracked, including from a gender perspective.
- In the specific case of environmental security risks, which are very high in the region, parliaments should explore ways to **turn risks into opportunities**. The implementation of the national sustainable development strategies will help to identify employment and innovation opportunities. Parliaments should address this issue through their legislative, oversight and budgetary functions as a matter of priority.
- In respect of SDG 3 (Health and Well-being), parliaments should strive to **achieve universal health coverage** and access to quality health care. They should also increase their efforts to reduce maternal, newborn and child mortality, and to end all preventable deaths before 2030, both having been called for in the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents Health (2016-2030). In the specific case of non-communicable diseases, parliaments should promote awareness campaigns about both prevention and treatment, especially for behavioural disorders, which pose a challenge to sustainable development.
- In recognizing that tobacco use is a leading cause of non-communicable disease and preventable death, parliaments should commit to **develop, strengthen and enforce comprehensive tobacco-control policies, legislation and regulations**. Those measures should fully incorporate the obligations of the FCTC and its guidelines into every national sustainable development strategy.

- There is a strong rationale for parliaments to **prioritize tobacco-control policies** in their efforts to achieve the SDGs for the following reasons:
 - Tobacco use is unique in the magnitude of the harm it causes in South Asia. As recognized at the 2011 High-Level meeting of the UN on Non-Communicable Diseases, tobacco use is the one risk factor that contributes to all four of the major causes of non-communicable diseases: cancer, cardiovascular, diabetes and respiratory illnesses.
 - Unlike many causes of disease, we know how to reduce the death and disease caused by tobacco use. The tobacco control policies in the FCTC are evidence-based, affordable, and cost effective. They have been proven to produce measurable, significant and verifiable reductions in tobacco use in every country in which they have been both adopted and effectively implemented.
 - If current trends continue in South Asia, more than 1.5 million people will continue to die each year from tobacco use and that number will continue to grow. Policies adopted globally between 2007 and 2014 could save as many as 26 million lives and billions of dollars in health care and lost productivity costs, as well as generating substantial resources for implementing the SDGs through increased taxation revenue.
 - Based on experiences throughout the world, the effective implementation of the tobacco control policies called for by the FCTC will result in the number of tobacco-related deaths in the region being reduced by millions; the associated cost savings will be of a similar magnitude.
- In the specific case of tobacco control as a strategy to meet SDG 3 targets, each parliament should work to **decrease the affordability of all tobacco products** by increasing tobacco taxes and proposing legislation to simplify tobacco tax structures that are easier to administer and more uniform across all tobacco products. Parliaments should also endeavour to set aside revenue generated from tobacco taxes, in order both to support tobacco-control efforts and to fund national sustainable development strategies.
- The IPU may assist by **building capacity appropriate to each parliament**. That will allow parliaments to engage with the SDGs, meet the expectations of their citizens and be equipped to deliver on the SDGs. We undertake to lend our support to such efforts.
- We also urge the IPU to **continue to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences** among parliamentarians at all levels. That will inspire action and maximize the contribution of parliaments to the implementation of the SDGs.
- We pledge to promote and advocate for **strong regional inter-parliamentary cooperation** on the SDGs, as well as for the promotion and development of joint initiatives between parliaments.
- We recognize that **regional cooperation** can play an important supportive role in achieving the SDGs in South Asia. That can be achieved by sharing best practices and building productive capacities through regional value chains, which are themselves supported by regional connectivity, pipelines, energy grids and the pooling of resources.

In order to inspire action on the SDGs, we will bring this Outcome Document to the attention of our parliaments and seek the support and assistance of our governments in its realization. We believe that the SDGs are far more challenging than the Millennium Development Goals. As a result, the SDGs will require a new level of active, collaborative partnerships between all stakeholders, including governments and parliaments.

We encourage the IPU to continue its engagement and to track, monitor and evaluate progress. That will enable exchanges and experiences from parliamentary engagement with the SDGs at the regional and national levels to feed into the global level, and so encourage further progress. We urge the IPU to bring our conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the global parliamentary community.

We recognize that a tobacco-free South Asia by 2030 is important to ensure the health and well-being of the people of the region. As Speakers of Parliament in the region, we see the value of meeting on a

regular basis both to share experiences and best practices, and to review progress on the implementation of the SDGs. With this in mind, we are happy to announce the establishment of the South Asian Speakers' Forum, which will henceforth meet at least once a year. The Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament will be the Chair of this newly established Forum until it meets in the first quarter of 2017 in India. At that time, the Honourable Speaker of the Lokh Sabha will become the Chair. The Parliament of Sri Lanka will host the second event in 2018. The Secretariat of the Forum will rotate with the Chair. The Forum can also take advantage of IPU Assemblies and other events in order to continue its discussions, interactions and cooperation.

The Forum will seek to include in its membership the parliaments of Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. The Forum requests the IPU to assist it in that regard. It requests the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to continue to provide technical support and assistance, as it did for the Dhaka Summit.