



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Third Committee

Agenda item 67: Promotion and protection of the rights of children United Nations, 15 October 2009

STATEMENT by Ambassador Anda Filip, Permanent Observer

Allow me to concentrate my remarks on questions relating to maternal and child mortality and to violence against children.

Before I do so, however, let me say a word on the global economic crisis. As many speakers have commented, the recent upheavals are jeopardizing years of development gains, and one of the reasons for this is the increasing likelihood of a drop in public health investments and a lack of prioritization of human rights issues on the political international and national agenda.

For the IPU, this poses a challenge. Sick and undernourished people do not place democracy high on their agenda. Daily survival is enough to think about. Discrimination also excludes other sections of society from participation. And without the backing of the public, democracy will become increasingly frail.

On the question of maternal and child mortality, we know that 97 per cent of all maternal and child deaths occur in 68 countries in the world. Only 16 of these countries are on track to reach Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 on child survival. Progress is slow.

Parliamentarians also know that health systems have long been marginalized in national development policies. There can be no progress without a probing assessment of national health systems that seeks to address their weaknesses and meet their needs. There is an acute need for more funding. Parliaments hold the purse strings, and they can do more to channel funds to areas where they are needed, by applying tools such as gender-sensitive budgeting.

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Countdown to 2015 Conference on Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival joined forces to step up parliamentary efforts to promote maternal, newborn and child health within the 68 priority countries. Since then, the IPU has continued to support parliaments in overseeing government action, running training workshops and seminars for members of parliament, disseminating information and backing national initiatives.

There are some encouraging signs. The Parliament of Zambia has set up a Parliamentary Caucus on Children to oversee government action in meeting its commitments on MDGs 4 and 5. The parliaments of Canada and Italy have both recently passed resolutions expressing strong commitment to achieving MDGs 4 and 5. In Canada, an all-party resolution was carried renewing Canada's commitment to reducing maternal and newborn mortality both at home and abroad. In Italy, the resolution adopted by the Senate seeks to increase Italian official development assistance for maternal, newborn and child health.

In times of financial crisis, such political commitments deliver strong messages in terms of international and national priorities. And they should be heeded. The parliaments of the world should not sit idly by if donor governments cut their aid budgets. At a recent IPU conference on the crisis held in Geneva, parliaments called on developed countries to honour the pledges they had made at Monterrey and Gleneagles, and more recently in London. The best kind of support that parliaments can provide to their governments is stringent oversight.

The other question I want to address is related to violence against children. This raises another challenge for parliaments: how to ensure that they adequately represent those whose voices are often not heard or listened to in society, namely children.

For five years now the IPU, in cooperation with UNICEF, has joined efforts to support parliaments in their action to secure respect for children's rights and enable children to live free of fear and violence. This year, the IPU focused its attention on Latin America and initiatives parliaments can take to address violence against children in that region.

Statistics show that each year 40 million children living in the Latin America and Caribbean region suffer severe abuse, including abandonment. Abuse within the family is only one of many examples of this type of violence and accounts for the deaths of 80,000 children under the age of 18. Surveys in 16 countries of the region conclude that a high percentage of adults consider maltreatment of children, including corporal punishment, a normal method for

imposing discipline. Child protection legislation is in many instances inadequate: for example only 9 per cent of children live under the protection of laws banning corporal punishment in the home.

Providing children with adequate protection and developing comprehensive legislation to prevent violence, assist victims and punish perpetrators were the central themes of the regional seminar on *The Role of Parliaments in Confronting Violence against Children* held in San José (Costa Rica) from 26 to 28 August 2009. Parliamentarians from 14 Latin American countries took part in the meeting hosted by the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica with the support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Once again, parliament's oversight and legislative functions were at the heart of discussions. Delegates examined legislative frameworks and discussed allocation and oversight of resources earmarked for protecting children and adolescents and the establishment of supervisory mechanisms. Particular attention was placed on ways of ensuring the active participation of children and adolescents in parliamentary processes.

At the close of the three-day meeting, a set of priority recommendations was adopted, which include: establishing, within parliaments and society, mechanisms to supervise the functioning of institutions responsible for policies of prevention and eradication of violence against children and adolescents; ensuring that there is the requisite investment for implementation of prevention and response policies as well as supervision of the appropriate use of allocated resources, promoting cooperation among parliaments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector (including the media, so as to develop policies and programmes that boost efforts aimed at eliminating violence against children and adolescents.

Much remains to be done, of course, and we will pursue our efforts in this area.

I would like to end by welcoming, on behalf of the IPU, the recent appointment of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Violence against Children, and would like to assure her of our Organization's support in carrying out her work.