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Remarks by the Secretary General Mr. Martin Chungong Lead Discussant

High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Ministerial dialogue on “a universal integrated policy agenda to implement Rio+20 and realize the future we want”

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Madam Moderator

I will comment on the presentations made from the standpoint of the community of parliamentarians that I am honoured to represent as the new SG of the IPU.

This discussion is of great interest to parliamentarians. The IPU has been at work since March of last year to help develop a parliamentary position on the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs in particular. My perspective today draws from some of the conclusions of the joint Parliamentary Hearing that was held here at the UN last November. The report of the Hearing is an official document of the high level segment (E/2014/52), and I invite you to have a look at it.

Having heard so much from the panelists and also my fellow lead discussants, I will focus on a few key thoughts on the very meaning of “*universality*” as a key principle of the new agenda. I will argue that this principle needs to be understood and internalized at a deeper level than is most commonly done. Getting to this deeper level is the main challenge we face going forward.

Very deep down, **universality must mean *reuniting people with nature***.

It sounds elementary, but this is the root of our problem today: a people, and an economic system, who regard the world outside us not as a place to nurture but to conquer, or exploit. We fail to understand that we as human beings are part of the environment and that the more we separate ourselves from the environment the more we alienate ourselves from each other as well, imposing costs on the planet and on others that can never be repaid.

If we understand this, then we will understand that what matters in sustainable development is human *well-being* in its broadest sense, that is as a combination or a balance between material comforts and other assets like health, education, culture, arts, time with family and friends and all those other so called “intangibles” that money cannot buy but that make us happy nevertheless. This is basically the thread that the UN is pursuing with its Dialogues on Harmony with Nature, and it is one that needs to be linked more tightly to the discussion within the HLPF and of course the Open Working Group that is working to define the new SDGs.

Reuniting people with nature will require many things of course, but none is most important than achieving decoupling (of economic growth from the environment) in *absolute* terms and not just in the *relative* terms that only some countries have managed so far. The only way we can get to that is by re-thinking the economic model of development from the ground up, beginning by replacing

the driver of economic growth as the end game. As we heard at the hearing, growth is important to defeat poverty, particularly in developing countries; but that importance should diminish as societies become more affluent. Past a certain point of “diminishing returns”, we need to think more of distribution and equity, and of course of well-being that can be derived from both inside and outside the economic sphere.

This is not to deny, of course, the critical role of the green economy in making our production and consumption more efficient from an environmental and social perspective. But if the system remains based on constantly increasing production and consumption driven by profit-making and material accumulation, there is no way that we can achieve absolute decoupling simply by improving efficiency. Drastically improving efficiencies throughout the economy is a necessary but insufficient condition. What we must also do is to change the drivers of the economy so that it's about people and not growth for its own sake. The old assumption that we must grow first and pay later for its economic and social consequences is no longer tenable. The environment and the social must go hand in hand with the economy.

There are at least two key steps to move us in this direction:

First: interfere with the blood line of the economy, in both developed and developing countries, which consists of three key things - money, enterprise and investments - so that they incorporate from the beginning a *social* dimension. That will also help us reconnect the ever expanding and volatile financial sector to the real economy where things are made or consumed.

Second: we must change drastically the metrics of the matter, so that we have much better measurements of progress than GDP and a few other economic indicators. We ought to invest massively in the science of *measuring well-being* and in integrating those new indicators in policy making. There is a movement on this at the UN and in several countries, but it needs to be accelerated and spread more widely. Developing countries of course will need the most in terms of capacity building for this new metrics, and including environmental accounting.

Another deep meaning of universality, which flows out of this larger perspective, has to do with inequality.

The economic origins of this phenomenon are well known. What I want to underscore here is that if we want this to be a universal agenda then it must draw in all people, and all people must see a benefit in being part of it. This calls for a new social contract virtually everywhere, so that we all come to see and accept how we depend on one another and on the planet. There can be no universal agenda in a fractured society in which only individual interests are elevated to a social virtue and even posited as the main engine of the economic system.

We need to search for a new balance between individual and social interests so that all people will have an opportunity to develop and flourish as human beings. That opportunity must in turn be grounded in a social floor of rights and entitlements, such as health and education, which must be accessible to all. The universal agenda is ultimately nothing more than the international human rights agenda.

But how do we come to this new social contract, and to this deeper understanding of development for all? For me, and for many MPs around the world, there is only one solution: **democratic governance**.

We need to drastically reform politics and the institutions of government and public administration at all levels so that they become more accountable to citizens and more inclusive of

all views. What we have today in far too many places is a system of governance that is for the few and by the few, as we can see, among other things, by the vast concentration of wealth in a few hands, or by the overwhelming influence of money in politics.

As long as we don't have institutions that are truly representative of all people, including the poor and most marginalized, and designed to satisfy the needs of society as a whole, the universal agenda will continue to elude us. Only partial if not failed solutions will be offered to people. This is why we must make sure that the SDGs will include a goal on democratic governance with a strong target on making all institutions of government, including parliaments, better able to deliver to the people.