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## Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

### (f) South Asian Speakers' Summit on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Dhaka (Bangladesh), 30-31 January 2016

Parliaments have a key role to play in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by holding governments accountable for the goals to which they have subscribed at the United Nations and by making sure that enabling laws are passed and budgets adopted. It is against this backdrop that the Parliament of Bangladesh and the IPU jointly organized a South Asian Speakers' Summit on achieving the SDGs. The meeting received technical support from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a US-based non-profit organization.

The debates of the Summit 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; (3) opportunities under SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages); (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. Experts from UNDP, ESCAP, WHO, the American and Canadian Cancer Societies, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids provided background information and helped to frame the discussions.

Speakers of parliament from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka participated in the Summit. From the outset they recognized the critical importance of democratic governance in the implementation of the SDGs. They reiterated their commitment to building political will for the implementation of the SDGs at the national level, as expressed in the Hanoi Declaration adopted at the 132<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly and in the Declaration adopted in New York at the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

The Summit discussed how the SDGs and their targets may apply to South Asia and advance the region's development. Special attention was paid to SDG 16 and to how parliaments will be able to institutionalize the global goals so as to capture the synergies and build coherence at the policy level. The Summit highlighted the need for each parliament to evaluate its own institutional processes in that connection. It recommended that special emphasis should be placed on assessing the needs of parliaments to exercise their legislative, oversight, budgetary and representative function, and thereby effectively translate the global commitments into meaningful change on the ground.

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One of the policy areas in which effective governance and policymaking are needed is health. In the past, health-related development goals focused on fighting infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, as well as on improving maternal health and on preventing infant mortality. The SDGs also include targets relating to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which account for 38 million deaths per year and 68 per cent of deaths globally. Tobacco is a leading cause of the most common NCDs: cardiovascular and lung disease, cancer and diabetes.

Through the prism of tobacco control policy, the discussion among the Speakers helped to shed light on some of the governance gaps in the respective countries, which render the public health response to this issue particularly difficult. In South Asia, the estimated total number of tobacco users is 384 million, which accounts for over a third (34.8 per cent) of the total tobacco users in the world (about 1.1 billion). The economic and health costs of tobacco use in all of these countries are staggering. In India and Bangladesh alone, tobacco kills over 1.1 million people annually based on conservative estimates.

The Summit recognized the interdependence between health and development. The Speakers agreed that parliaments should increase their efforts to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, including by tackling the growing burden of non-communicable diseases in their countries. Strengthening the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was seen an important step in this direction.

The Summit agreed that there is a strong rationale for parliaments to prioritize tobacco control policies in their efforts to achieve the SDGs, primarily because it is known how to reduce death and disease resulting from tobacco use, and this is not the case with many other causes of disease. 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.

The Speakers' Summit encouraged the IPU to track, monitor and evaluate progress, so that exchanges and experiences from parliamentary engagement with the SDGs at the regional and national levels feed into the global level and encourage further progress. The Speakers decided to continue meeting on a regular basis both to share experiences and best practices, and to review progress on the implementation of the SDGs in the South Asian region.