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President's activities report

(a) On his activities since the 200th session of the Governing Council

As this period covers the final six months of my three year mandate, I have attempted to take stock of what we have achieved as an Organization, how we have improved our outreach to our Members and the wider audience, what we have done to enhance the standing and elevate the status of the IPU and our response to current and emerging challenges.

I have done so as ever in close consultation with the Secretary General. We have developed an excellent and open working relationship over the past few years, consulting with each other regularly about important issues on the IPU agenda and this has certainly had a positive and beneficial impact on the work of our organization.

On 26 April, I addressed the Regional Seminar for Young Parliamentarians of the Asia-Pacific region in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In my address, I highlighted that pluralism, diversity and inclusiveness were central values of the IPU. Youth participation had to go above and beyond youth consultation. Indeed, it should be about young people making a meaningful contribution to their society by shaping policy-making. This would entail young politicians and young leaders in every sphere of nation life and also promote our objective of inclusive parliaments that are representative of societies they represent.

For me, youth participation in politics and parliament was not only a way to harness the talents of youth. I firmly believe that it is also an antidote to youth marginalization that was leading to despair and radicalization.

Positive change should be sought through creative ideas and policies that would halt and reverse the negative trends we were witnessing. Drawing on the insights, creativity, innovation and experiences of young people, innovative, youth-led solutions to preventing radicalization and violent extremism can be identified.

Last but not least, I encouraged the young MPs in attendance to serve as role models so as to inspire other young people in the world. Their support and inspiration could have an immeasurable impact on shaping mind sets and empowering young men and women to bring about positive change.

From 6 to 8 May, I was in Kathmandu, Nepal, where I had been invited to deliver the keynote address at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health South Asia Tobacco Control Leadership Programme. This event provided a good opportunity to follow up on the Summit of South Asian Speakers held in 2016 in Dhaka on tobacco control. My keynote address on 8 May focused on how to navigate the legislative process in advancing tobacco control, using the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control as the international standard. I also identified some of the factors that affected tobacco control legislative decision-making among MPs and the importance of networking and coalition-building in influencing the legislative process. Lastly, I outlined the key elements for effective advocacy strategies for promoting tobacco control in legislative/parliamentary settings and its importance in promoting SDGs and Agenda 2030.

I also moderated a panel discussion on *The importance of partnerships and coalitions in creating political support for tobacco control* on 9 May. The panel identified the advantages of partnerships and coalitions in advocating for tobacco control, as well as key tobacco control stakeholders in their respective countries.

On 11 May, I participated together with the Secretary General in the Regional Seminar for Asia-Pacific Parliaments on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Ho Chi Minh, Viet Nam. The event symbolized the solid partnership between the National Assembly of Viet Nam and the IPU and built on the theme of the 132nd IPU Assembly held in Hanoi: *The Sustainable Development Goals: Turning words into action*.

I stated that the IPU was proud to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences among parliamentarians at all levels in order to inspire action and maximize the contribution of parliaments to the implementation of the goals. As parliamentarians, we had a critical role to play to ensure that government actions were inclusive and transformative for those we represented.

I was invited to attend the 42nd parliamentary session of the Canadian House of Commons in Ottawa in June. I thanked Canada for its strong and unwavering support for the IPU and the quality of Canadian MPs' contributions to IPU debates and work. I met with Speakers Geoff Regan and George Furey, with whom I discussed the main issues on the IPU's radar screen: the SDGs, gender equality climate change and disaster risk reduction, as well as cooperation with the United Nations. I also raised another emerging challenge: violent extremism and terrorism in the context of the IPU's core mandate of peace building and conflict prevention.

Last but not least, I attended Question Period in the Senate, where Senator Dawson introduced a motion to discuss the SDGs in the Canadian Senate. During the same exercise in the House of Commons, I was introduced to the members and followed its lively discussions.

As a member of the High-Level Steering Group for Every Woman, Every Child, I was invited to the launch of the first progress report on the Global Strategy on 18 July in New York, USA. I spoke on the theme *The role of parliaments in unlocking and leveraging the full potential of women, children and adolescents and the IPU's efforts in delivering on the Global Strategy*.

In my intervention, I underscored that parliaments and parliamentarians, by virtue of their constitutional powers, influenced laws and policies to improve the lives of people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. Their role was essential to accelerating progress in the health of all sectors of society. Indeed, parliaments held national governments accountable through their oversight function. As representatives of the people, parliaments had the power to hear and voice public and social concerns to retain public legitimacy and ensure institutional accountability. Thanks to their representative function, parliamentarians had it in their power to make access to health a reality for all, including the most marginalized and vulnerable sectors of society.

In implementation of its own health-related resolution and key policy documents such as the Global Strategy, the IPU had developed partnerships with the World Health Organization, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and UNAIDS. During my stay in New York, I also attended the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development at UN Headquarters.

The Secretary General and I were invited to attend the inauguration ceremony of President Rouhani in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, on 4 August 2017. In addition to this official function, we held talks with the Speaker of the Islamic Parliament of Iran, Mr. Larijani. We discussed the situation in Syria and Iran's role in the region. We also discussed the conflict in Yemen, which was taking on dramatic proportions with recent outbreaks of cholera having been reported. Common to both conflicts was a woeful humanitarian situation which must be improved to save the lives of millions of innocent civilians. We agreed that a peaceful political solution was the only viable and lasting way out of the conflict in both countries, which had ramifications for the wider region.

I travelled to Riga, Latvia, from 4 to 6 September at the invitation of the Speaker of the Saeima. The Latvian Parliament is one of the oldest IPU Members, having first joined the Organization in 1923 until 1936, and after a long hiatus, again in 1991 after the fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union. I met the President of the Republic, a former parliamentarian, who had attended the IPU Assemblies in Quito and Quebec City. I also met the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and the Chair of the Human Rights Committee. The latter expressed a keen interest in engaging in the Universal Periodic Report process of the UN Human Rights Council.

I congratulated the political and parliamentary authorities on the excellent progress the country had made over the past decades. Latvia had been ranked a high-income country since 2014 and stood at a proud 46th place on the Human Development Index. It was a full member of the European Union, the Euro zone, NATO and the United Nations. It was a shining example of parliamentary democracy at work. I congratulated the country for having elected its first woman Prime Minister and first woman Speaker of Parliament, which sent a strong message about gender equality.

On 8 September at IPU Headquarters, I held meetings with delegations from Yemen representing the Aden-based and Sana'a-based factions of the Parliament. We had separate meetings and they each briefed me on the situation on the ground as they saw it.

We discussed a possible parliamentary initiative that would focus on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis in Yemen given that cholera amongst children has taken an epidemic form and a famine that could impact millions is looming in the horizon. Both also expressed strong support for an IPU mission to Yemen to gain a first-hand view of the situation. On the same day, I signed the IPU petition for stronger democracies to mark the International Day of Democracy for 2017.

I attended the UN General Assembly at UN Headquarters in New York from 18-22 September 2017. I also participated in the meeting of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Steering Group for Every Woman Every Child on 18 September and renewed and reiterated IPU's commitment to the EWEC Agenda and spoke about the important role of parliaments in leveraging health as a key driver in development and the need to focus in particular on women's, child and adolescents health in humanitarian and fragile settings. During my stay in New York, I spoke briefly with both the UN Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed.

On 30 September I visited the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh near its border with Myanmar. It was extremely distressing and disturbing to hear first-hand the harrowing tales of brutality and persecution from those who were lucky to survive the onslaught and make it to Bangladesh. About 70 per cent of the refugees were women and children and preliminary reports indicated about 50,000 women were pregnant and due to give birth over the next few months. Over half a million Rohingyas had crossed into Bangladesh in just one month and more were on the way as the persecution and the killings continued unabated and villages were being burnt. Being both stateless and refugees, the Rohingyas were perhaps the most persecuted and deprived of basic rights. While the Government of Bangladesh and its Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as well as the people of Bangladesh, should be commended for opening its borders and embracing the Rohingyas, an urgent solution to the problem in terms of stopping the persecution in Myanmar, as well as ensuring the safe and speedy return of all the Rohingyas to Myanmar, must be found.

I visited Colombo at the invitation of the Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament, Mr. Karu Jayasuriya, and attended the special parliamentary session to commemorate the 70th anniversary of parliamentary democracy in Sri Lanka on 3 October. The President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Speakers of Parliament of the South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Nepal), and Deputy Speakers from Afghanistan and Pakistan, were also in attendance. Seventy years of uninterrupted parliamentary democracy was a very special occasion and it was an honour to represent the IPU. During my short stay in Colombo, I was very pleased and enthused to learn of work of the Select Committee of the Parliament of Sri Lanka on the SDGs headed by the Deputy Speaker, Ms. Thilanga Sumathipala, and how the IPU's self-assessment toolkit was considered an effective tool.

On 5 October, I met a delegation of parliamentarians from the ruling Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) at IPU Headquarters in Geneva and listened to their interpretation of recent events on the Indian Ocean island-State. Presidential and parliamentary elections were scheduled in the Maldives for 2018 and the political environment was very charged. While the opposition claimed that the Government was doing everything possible to ensure its leaders were barred from taking part in the elections, the Government contended that everything was being done according to the rule of law. I impressed upon the visiting delegation that the delegation from the Maldives to the 137th Assembly should comprise both Government and opposition MPs and the Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians would be examining the many cases on its files during its meeting in St. Petersburg. I of course encouraged dialogue with the opposition and efforts by all sides to ensure that the next elections were inclusive and participatory.

I was pleased to welcome the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait, Mr. Marzouq Al-Ghanim, to House of Parliaments on 6 October. We discussed the humanitarian challenges in various parts of the world and he reiterated his full support and commitment to the values, standards and work of the IPU.

During my stay in Geneva, I met with the heads of the various IPU programmes and reviewed the arrangements for the 137th IPU Assembly in St. Petersburg.

While this is the final report I deliver to you as IPU President, I can assure you that even beyond my tenure I will continue to promote the IPU and its ideals and to serve it in whatever capacity I can to the best of my ability. Serving you as your President has been a profound honour and I sign off in gratitude and humility for the trust and confidence you have reposed in me to serve the national parliaments of the world and the people we represent.