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TOWARDS RISK-RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT: TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND NATURAL CONSTRAINTS

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
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The growing impact of disasters is challenging the international community's efforts to achieve sustainable development.¹

Since the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, countries and communities have noticeably scaled up their efforts to build resilience to disasters. However, vulnerability and exposure are building up at an ever increasing rate around the world, steadily heightening the risk of the global population and economy in the face of natural hazards and climate change. According to the 2013 Global Assessment Report, the net movement of people and economic activities to areas prone to floods and tropical cyclones is increasing globally faster than ever before.² Significantly, losses on account of disasters are mounting more rapidly than the rate at which economies are growing.

A growing number of parliamentarians have stepped up their efforts to promote disaster risk reduction in various ways. Disaster risk reduction is increasingly discussed at IPU assemblies in the context of disaster management, climate change and sustainable development. It has become clear to many parliamentarians that inadequate governance has hampered progress on reducing risk. Existing national policies and strategies – almost always addressing risk through stand-alone disaster risk reduction projects – merely scratch the surface of the problem. Because of this, the IPU and UNISDR jointly organized a session on governance for disaster risk reduction at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in May 2013 in Geneva.

In a bid to press for resilient and sustainable development, the co-Rapporteurs prepared a background paper on "Towards risk-resilient development: Taking into consideration demographic trends and natural constraints", to facilitate preparation of the panel discussion on this subject at the 129th IPU Assembly. In the report, they pointed out that disaster risk-resilient development is not only about protecting people's lives and livelihoods but also about social, economic and environmental sustainability, aimed at reducing socio-economic exposure and vulnerabilities to natural hazards.

It is about building social, economic and environmental resilience through the systematic integration of disaster risk reduction into overall development planning, policy and programmes. In order to achieve risk-resilient development, the co-Rapporteurs emphasized the important linkages between population issues and disasters and climate change.

¹ During the period 2000-2012, disasters killed 1.2 million people, affected 2.9 billion and caused economic losses of approximately US\$ 1.7 trillion. Since 2010, annual world economic losses due to disasters exceed US\$ 100 billion. Disasters affect development in more sectors than one can imagine.

² The global population increased by 87% during the period 1970-2010, while the proportion of people living on cyclone-exposed coastlines increased by 192%. Estimated GDP exposed to tropical cyclones worldwide has increased from US\$ 526 billion to US\$ 1.6 trillion. OECD countries have also been experiencing rising economic losses, rising faster than GDP growth per capita, meaning that the risk of losing wealth in weather-related disasters is increasing faster than wealth is being created, even in the world's more developed economies.

Climate change and disaster risks, together with population growth and pressure,³ represent a complex challenge for the international community in terms of achieving sustainable development. Growing disaster threats, combined with changing demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population, make for a highly potent interaction.

The draft resolution prepared by the co-Rapporteurs for the consideration of the delegates to the 130th IPU Assembly was based on concerns expressed at the previous Assembly. A panel discussion was held on the significant losses and impact of disasters on population and socio-economic development and the far-reaching impact of climate change and population on the level of risk and development.⁴

The panel shared the view that sustainable development cannot be achieved without greater disaster-risk reduction, as sustainability demands that nations and communities are able to cope with shocks. It also importantly differentiated between natural hazards and disasters and emphasized that disasters are in essence not natural and are the product of flawed and misconceived development processes and actions.

The focus should be not only on reducing existing and current risk but also on averting the creation and accumulation of new risk. The more we grow and the more assets we build and create, the higher our exposure and risk. All of these considerations will need to be appropriately addressed.

Population growth and the right to access family planning services are closely interrelated and must be better coordinated and effectively addressed and mainstreamed in order to reduce disaster risk. The draft resolution underlines that demographic dynamics are a significant contributor to climate change and disaster risk insofar as they strain natural resources and ecosystems and heighten the vulnerability of communities – primarily to meet increasing demands for food, fresh water, timber and fuel.

Governance, it was agreed, remains inadequate for dealing with the complicated equation of disaster risk, climate change and population dynamics such as migration, urbanization and family planning. The draft resolution calls upon all members of parliament to equip themselves with information and knowledge about disaster and risk trends, as well as demographic dynamics, with a view to enhancing their oversight role.

Parliamentarians have a major responsibility for reducing the impact and risk of disasters and for protecting people and their country's socio-economic development from disasters and climate change. Parliamentarians must scrutinize the implementation of government policy on disaster-risk reduction, climate change and sustainable development, and use all the legal instruments at the disposal of their legislative bodies to ensure that disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures are integrated into national planning and budgeting processes.

This draft resolution reflects improved understanding, insight and consensus on a range of important issues. It provides a solid basis for a lively and enriching debate at the 130th IPU Assembly. The Assembly offers us an opportunity to provide a strong, clear and resolute parliamentary contribution to international efforts aimed at promoting risk-resilient development and addressing related demographic issues - critical preconditions and components of sustainable development. It is important to emphasize that both parliaments and parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters and climate change. The draft resolution concludes by calling on all parliaments to display leadership, press for greater political will at all levels of governments and drive the process forward.

IPU Members are invited to take urgent action to follow up on the recommendations made in the draft resolution to be adopted in their respective countries and regions.

³ The pressure on ecosystems will continue to increase, as the world's population is growing by about 78 million persons each year. According to the latest United Nations report on population prospects, the current world population of 7.2 billion will increase by almost 1 billion within the next 12 years, reaching 8.1 billion in 2025 and 9.6 billion in 2050.³ Population growth is a crucial factor in the consumption and exploitation of natural resources, which can only be offset - in part - by technological advances and efficiency gains or by rebalancing the environmental footprint of developed and developing nations.

⁴ Panel discussion on "Towards risk-resilient development: Taking into consideration demographic trends and natural constraints".