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Concept note

General Debate on Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all

Rising levels of inequality undermine human rights and opportunity for all, having a direct impact on human well-being and setting the stage for economic, social and political instability. In response, in 2015, the international community agreed to take decisive action.

Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals, calls on governments to "reduce inequalities within and among countries".

Articulating key areas of concern and possible interventions, this goal includes the following core targets:

1. By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average;
2. By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status;
3. Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard;
4. Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality;
5. Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations;
6. Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions;
7. Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

The SDGs are an integrated package of 17 goals. Each nation must take strong action on Goal 10, combatting economic, social and political inequalities, for the entire agenda of poverty eradication and sustainable development to succeed.

#IPU136

Specific action to advance gender equality, a particularly important aspect of this broad issue, is further elaborated under Goal 5 of the SDGs. Goal 16, on promoting inclusive societies, justice, as well as effective and accountable institutions, underpins all of the SDGs and provides important guidance as to the reforms required to advance social justice and ensure that no one is left behind. As youth are increasingly marginalized, tackling inequality will require a dedicated effort to support youth participation and empowerment, as several targets of the SDGs suggest.

While Goal 10 represents the global consensus on this issue, solutions vary from country to country depending on the political and cultural context. There is no one-size fits all. As a multidimensional and inter-linked phenomenon, inequality needs to be tackled from multiple angles.

Goal 10 leaves it to governments and their people to determine how to reduce the gap between the haves and the have not and more generally between those at the top of the social ladder and those at the bottom. Likewise, it is up to each country to decide which regulations need to be improved (target 5), how to address discriminatory laws (target 3), and the extent and manner to ensure inclusive decision-making (target 2).

The international human rights framework provides the main unifying theme between these targets and throughout the SDGs. This framework makes it mandatory for governments to do everything they can to realize fundamental rights such as the right to education, health, and political participation. Globally, the right to development is the responsibility of the entire international community, requiring stronger development cooperation, economic governance, and win-win trade agreements, among others things.

The general debate at the 136th IPU Assembly will advance awareness and discussion on these issues and indicate a way forward toward the implementation of Goal 10 of the SDGs. Parliamentarians are invited to share their national experience in tackling economic, social and political inequality, its impact on the poor, women and vulnerable groups, as well as, more critically, concrete policy proposals to effectively address the problem, both within and among countries.

Questions that parliamentarians may wish to address include:

- Does Goal 10 provide sufficient guidance on this issue, or should countries aim higher?
- How can the poor and marginalized, as well as women, youth and other groups, be better included in all decision-making?
- Is there a way to determine fairly the extent to which economic, social and political inequalities need to be reduced in each country?
- How can policies be designed coherently to capture and address the inter-linkages between various types of inequality?
- How should the economic cost of inequality (i.e., higher welfare and health care budgets, expensive security systems, lost productivity etc.) be factored into the policy response?
- How can parliamentarians engage with their constituents to effectively carry forward this debate?
- How can inter-parliamentary cooperation help to reduce inequality among countries?

A draft outcome document capturing the main policy recommendations from the debate will be submitted for adoption before the closing of the Assembly.