



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

136th IPU Assembly

Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1- 5 April 2017



Dhaka Communiqué *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all*

*Endorsed by the 136th IPU assembly
(Dhaka, 5 April 2017)*

We, parliamentarians from 132 countries, gathered in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on the occasion of the 136th IPU Assembly, having debated the problem of inequality in all its forms – social, economic and political – issue the following statement.

While the question of inequality is one that each country needs to settle democratically as part of its own social contract, it is clear to us that extreme inequalities come at a high cost: people are denied the opportunity to flourish to the maximum of their individual potential and in accordance with their human rights; large sectors of the population lose purchasing power, stalling economic growth; power and wealth concentrated in a few hands undermine social cohesion and the very viability of the democratic process, increasing violence and insecurity. Many of our countries are already at this point, and many more will be soon, unless we take resolute, concerted action.

Welcoming Goal 10 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which calls on the international community to “reduce inequalities within and among countries”, we pledge to place concern for all inequalities – social, economic and political – at the heart of our work. We take this opportunity to renew our commitment to combat gender inequality, which is rooted in discrimination against women, as a particularly important dimension of this multifaceted problem.

We recognize that reversing the current trend towards growing inequalities is a necessary condition for the implementation of the SDGs and their two principal objectives: eradicating poverty, and putting the world on a sustainable course. We are determined to address the structural causes of inequality and not be satisfied with palliative solutions.

We are deeply concerned that:

- While income and wealth are disproportionately concentrated in the top 1 to 10 per cent of the global population, a growing number of people around the world, particularly young people: are unemployed or under-employed; lack productive assets; are underpaid; have limited access to education, health care and other social services; often live in unsafe communities; and are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. These people suffer disproportionately from social ills. They face violence and discrimination, are unable to participate fully in society, and encounter other barriers to realizing their human rights. Refugees, stateless persons and migrants are a large group that is particularly vulnerable to inequality, discrimination and violence;
- Women continue to be paid less than men for the same kind of work, and are overrepresented in the lowest-paid jobs and in precarious employment conditions. They are often denied the right to own property and bear a disproportionate share of the burden of unpaid domestic work;

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- Large numbers of people are marginalized or *de facto* excluded from the political process because of their social or economic status; they include women, young people, indigenous people, migrant workers, disabled people, and ethnic minorities;
- A relatively small number of multinationals in the manufacturing, service and agriculture sectors dominate the market and technological innovation, reducing competition and opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as artisanal fisheries and small land owners.

Economic, social and political inequalities are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. This is why our response will take a holistic approach, ensuring that policymaking and decision-making processes are inclusive, participatory and take into account the needs of all.

We will commit to macroeconomic policies that promote: employment as the primary source of livelihood for most people; higher wages; and a fairer distribution of the tax burden between high income and lower income earners, as well as between corporations and individuals. Our economic and social policies will seek to invest in people as the primary resource of our countries. This includes larger investment in education, which provides all people with an opportunity to grow as economic, social and political actors.

As the past few decades have shown, economic growth does not always lead to equal opportunity and shared prosperity. While economic growth remains critical, particularly in developing countries, it will not be sufficient to reduce income and wealth inequalities unless it is accompanied by proactive redistributive policies. In this connection, we reaffirm the 2013 Quito Communiqué (128th IPU Assembly) and, in particular, its call on all countries to assess the success of economic policies based on measurements of well-being that go beyond GDP. We have an obligation to pursue a more sustainable economic model to effectively decouple economic growth from environmental degradation.

In redressing inequalities, each country will have to devise its own solutions, as no single policy prescription can meet all needs. Our debate has highlighted a wide range of measures that parliaments should consider in their efforts to reduce inequalities at the national and global levels, including:

Strengthening legal frameworks

- Ensure that all laws and budgetary allocations promote everyone's human rights;
- Uphold the rule of law and the principle that all people are equal under the law, regardless of social status or personal wealth;
- Enact laws and regulations to facilitate the participation of all citizens, including the most vulnerable and marginalized, in the political process as well as their access to elected office;
- Seek to entrench in the constitution the principle of human dignity and equality of opportunity for all;

Making parliaments more representative

- Strengthen efforts to open parliaments and decision-making to all people, reaching out, listening more and better representing the most impoverished in our own countries;
- Take measures to enhance transparency and protect the political system from the influence of money and organized lobbies, including through conflict-of-interest rules, effective limits to private funding of candidates and political parties, and anti-corruption legislation;
- Enhance the capacity of parliaments to take into account future trends and the needs of future generations;

Making the economy work for all

- Pursue economic and social policies that protect the most vulnerable, including by investing in public goods such as health care, transport and education for the benefit of all citizens;
- Combat tax evasion, including through tax havens, make sure the tax regime is sufficiently progressive, and emphasize direct taxes, taxes on investment income and capital gains, and corporate taxes as part of the revenue mix;
- Institute stronger anti-trust laws and regulations to prevent an excessive concentration of industrial production and assets, such as patents and land, in fewer conglomerates;
- Regulate the financial sector to avoid excessive risk, ensuring that any losses that may occur are not passed on to taxpayers;
- Support entrepreneurship by simplifying licensing and other administrative procedures, and by facilitating access to financing;
- Incentivize small and medium enterprises, including family owned and cooperative enterprises;

Strengthening social dialogue and human capital

- Strengthen labour laws to protect workers' rights, and to guarantee to all a living wage and basic benefits, such as minimum vacation, parental leave and unemployment insurance;
- Ensure that the benefits of automation in all economic sectors are fairly distributed between business owners and workers, including by providing stronger safety nets and workers' adjustment programmes;
- Institute or strengthen public pension schemes, including for informal sector workers and women performing unpaid domestic work;
- Provide affordable public education at all levels as well as training and vocational programmes, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, so as to give all people an equal opportunity to work;

Improving international cooperation

- Strengthen development cooperation to improve the quality and quantity of aid to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, and to improve the benefits of foreign direct investment in recipient economies;
- Support fair trade practices that ensure fair prices are paid for commodities and natural resources from developing countries;
- Facilitate the economic diversification of developing countries away from commodity dependence;
- Help strengthen global economic and financial governance through the United Nations and other multilateral bodies to prevent capital flight and other shocks;
- Advocate for a fairer representation of the interests of developing countries in the institutions of global economic and financial governance.

We fully realize that growing inequalities produce indirect economic costs that are often hidden and unevenly distributed among the population. We will need to better factor these costs into the budgetary and legislative process. In a similar vein, we will scrutinize the annual budget Bill with a view to reducing inequalities.

As we continue our law-making and oversight work, and in the spirit of the SDGs, in particular of Goal 10, we pledge to our citizens and to the international community our determination to leave no one behind.

As the representatives of the people, we will do our utmost to move this agenda forward.