

Check against delivery

Redressing Inequalities and Achieving Sustainable Development:
The Case of the Republic of Korea

Delivered by H.E. Chung Sye-kyun, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea on the occasion of the 136th IPU Assembly in Dhaka, Bangladesh on April 2, 2017

Dear colleagues representing countries around the world at the IPU,

It is a great pleasure to be here.

I am Chung Sye-kyun, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea.

Allow me to first take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Honorable Speaker of the House of the Nation of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh parliamentary staff, IPU President Mr. Saber Chowdhury, IPU Secretary General Mr. Martin Chungong, and the IPU Secretariat for preparing this prestigious meeting in Dhaka, a city proudly boasting a history of a thousand years.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the inequalities we face and the issue of sustainable development.

Honorable delegates,

Today, we are standing at the entrance of a tunnel of low growth and uncertainty. Uncertainty is spreading across the world with the significant weakening of vitality in the global economy following the global financial crisis. This is coupled with a rising trend in nationalism of putting one's own country first and protectionism.

Prolonged economic stagnation on a global dimension is leading to a decline in real income of middle classes and low-income groups and a widening of income inequality between different social groups. This is emerging as a huge challenge not only for each individual country but for the international society as a whole.

In an effort to sever the vicious cycle of low growth and worsening inequality, there is a call for the need to focus not on the size or speed of growth but on the quality and direction of growth.

An excellent response to this demand is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. It is particularly worth noting that the UN SDGs consider the redressing of social inequalities not simply as a normative issue but as a condition for economic growth and also as economic growth itself.

In full acknowledgement of this recognition, Korea is making multilateral efforts to redress social inequality and achieve sustainable development.

First, we are focusing efforts to address the imbalance in the labor market and resolve income disparity by reducing the size of irregular workers and raising the level of minimum wage. In this context, the National Assembly drastically enhanced the quality and stability of employment this year by directly employing cleaning workers at the National Assembly who were formerly employed as irregular workers by an outsourced service company.

Second, we are working to protect vulnerable groups by reducing institutional blind spots in the employment insurance system, raising the level of unemployment benefits, providing Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-income groups, and strengthening support for tailored employment for vulnerable groups in the labor market.

Third, we are expanding government R&D investments in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and enterprises of middle standing that play a core role in the creation of new jobs. We are also devoting efforts to strengthen their industrial competitiveness by providing consulting in various fields and promoting technology finance.

Fourth, we are actively implementing measures to achieve gender equality, such as establishing the Gender Equality Policy Master Plan based on the Framework Act on Gender Equality, gender impact analysis, gender sensitive budget, and gender sensitive education.

Honorable delegates,

Korea is working to not only address inequality on a national level but also inequality among countries.

Despite worsening global economic conditions, we are continuing to increase our ODA budget, and actively participating in various aid programs of the international society, including the IPU and UN.

In particular, we contributed to strengthening the capacity of parliaments, including those of developing countries, by hosting the World e-Parliament Conference jointly with the IPU in 2014.

But in the process of joining efforts with the international society, there is a country we cannot ignore: North Korea.

The Republic of Korea and the international society have taken a great interest in and devoted

many efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the North Korean people and promote economic cooperation with North Korea, which is struggling with economic difficulties, including a lack of food.

But with the international society adopting stringent sanctions against its recent military provocations, the provision of aid to and economic cooperation with North Korea have come to a complete stop.

I do not believe these sanctions target the North Korean people.

In this sense, the international society needs to adopt a forward-looking perspective and consider resuming humanitarian aid and economic cooperation with North Korea within the framework of international cooperation.

At the same time, we strongly urge North Korea to stop its nuclear development activities and take the step towards sustainable development.

In connection to this, I am pursuing a parliamentary dialogue among countries of the Six Party Talks as a means to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and achieve the settlement of peace on the Korean Peninsula. It is my sincere hope that this window of dialogue can be materialized in the near future. We are also looking forward to an opportunity to discuss matters on the Korean Peninsula at the IPU for which we seek your active support and cooperation.

Thank you for your kind attention.