



SPEECH

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE THEME OF THE 136TH IPU GENERAL ASSEMBLY
“*REDRESSING INEQUALITIES: DELIVERING ON DIGNITY AND
WELL-BEING FOR ALL*”**

Madam President

I wish to extend, on behalf of the Zimbabwe delegation and indeed on my own behalf, our sincere gratitude to the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh their warm hospitality.

The theme of the 136th IPU General Assembly, “*Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all*” is fortuitous as it aptly captures the contemporary dilemma in our world. Its intrinsic value is in the challenge it gives to the discourse on human development. Without doubt, the theme is a befitting acknowledgement of the current global economic and political environment which is so raucously fraught with imbalances, systematic disempowerment of billions of people by those with privilege and power, the marginalisation of citizens by organised political systems, and the pervasive inequalities in the distribution of global wealth.

Madam President,

I need not over emphasize the dangers of socio-economic inequalities to political development as history is replete with examples of populist and fascist movements capturing and mobilising the anger of the marginalised masses. Addressing inequality is, therefore, one of the ways of guaranteeing responsible political development and stability. As we move towards the **Sustainable Development Goals**, it is important that we reform all the existing economic and political superstructures to ensure that we erase the barriers to inclusive integration of societies and engender the deliverance of dignity and well-being for all. Democracy can only function effectively when everyone in society plays by the same set of rules.

Madam President,

The role that Parliament can play in redressing inequalities is more profound and can be extended to include, the adoption by governments of economically inclusive policies but which promote economic and social enclaves. This calls for economic empowerment and integration of marginalised social groups such as women and the young people, creation of spaces for objective articulation of the concerns of all citizens regardless of racial or ethnic identity, and the adoption of pro poor policies by national governments. The future lies in proactiveness and responsive leadership in the face of globalisation, not brutal and avaricious capitalism, which has presented immense challenges for the powerless billions who are confronted by the enormous power of big cooperate interests and corrupt governments.

Madam President,

In Zimbabwe, the Government has come up with a number of initiatives and broad socio-economic measures to redress inequalities most of which spring from our colonial history of racial discrimination and unequal development.

After independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe Government rolled out a socialist-oriented programme along the lines of the welfare state with the thrust to cater for the basic human needs and restore dignity. Free education and health care were provided for all citizens. Most importantly, the Government realised the importance of education as a tool for redressing inequalities and empowerment. Subsequently, access to education was broadened and a number of schools and universities were built. Today, Zimbabwe boasts of one of the highest literacy rates in Africa with at least 7 state and 6 church and private Universities producing a huge population of graduates and a human resource base.

The most important and significant initiative taken by the government was the **Fast Track Land Reform Program in 2000** which dismantled the previously racialised commercial agricultural sector where only 4% of the population owned 80% of the land. About 300 000 hitherto landless and previously marginalised black families were resettled and became successfully integrated into national economic participation. This economic reform initiative was also extended to other sectors of the country's economy including mining and manufacturing where in 2009 the government through Parliament enacted **the Economic Empowerment and Indigenisation Act** which sought to create an equitable ownership structure of national wealth between the indigenous people and foreign firms and investors. The Act prescribed a 51/49% ownership structure and compelled companies to give a stake to their employees. Mining Companies, especially in the diamond and platinum sector, were compelled to create Community Share Ownership Trusts with the money being used to develop local communities under which they mined.

Other policies include: **Legal age of Majority Act (1982)** to redress gender disparities, the **Labour Relations Act (1985)** addresses discrimination against women in employment and recruitment, and the **Deceased Persons Family Maintenance Act (1987)**, gave women inheritance rights. To mention but a few.

Our Constitution also codifies the principle of equality which it entrenches as one of the cardinal features in the Bill of Rights. **Section 56 of the Constitution** specifically relates to equality and non-discrimination. It establishes that all persons are equal before the law, promotes gender equality, and upholds the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of race, colour, tribe, and place of birth, ethnic or social origin.

With all these initiatives, Zimbabwe has been able to address a number of historically imbedded socio-economic inequalities and create a national structure which is inclusive and respects the dignity of all citizens. Although unemployment, specifically of the youth continues to be a challenge, we unflinchingly strive towards erasing the structural deficits of exclusive growth and creating a nation imbued with equality, freedom and justice for all.

I THANK YOU