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**“REDRESSING INEQUALITIES: DELIVERING ON DIGNITY AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL”**

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Distinguished Chair,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to thank the Parliament of Bangladesh for hosting this IPU Assembly.

Allow me to bring warm greetings on behalf of our new President of the Canadian Group of the IPU, Mr. David McGuinty.

I want to acknowledge the importance and salience of this general debate on *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all*.

The Sustainable Development Goals have brought countries together to establish targets to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

Although we have witnessed extraordinary progress in a number of countries, growing disparities in income, education and opportunities threaten social peace.

Tensions that fray the bonds of communities can appear, but can also lead to calls for more inclusive and fair societies around the world.

Occupy Wall Street, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter are only three recent North American examples that illustrate the calls for increased equality and social integration.

Today, I will offer a few thoughts on how parliaments and governments can best ensure the well-being of the people we represent.

I will speak to specific measures Canada recently took to better include marginalized groups, such as women, young people and Indigenous people in all decision-making processes in the hope to provide a way forward for the implementation of Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals on reducing inequalities.

As a first general point, I would emphasize the need to take a holistic approach when debating how to reduce inequality within and among countries.

We all know that we cannot think of “inequality” and “well-being” as purely economic concepts; they need to be tackled from multiple angles.

Underlying factors that give rise to equality of opportunities – such as access to healthcare and education – deserve our closest attention.

We need a level playing field that can facilitate upward mobility, and ultimately, prosperity.

In that regard, Canada recently improved its child benefit contributions which have given 9 out of 10 families more money to help with the high cost of raising their children.

This initiative aims to reduce child poverty in Canada by around 40%.

We have also increased the amount of assistance Canadian students receive, making post-secondary education more affordable.

But, we have also invested in a range of training and employment programs for unemployed and underemployed Canadians workers, allowing them to upgrade their skills so they are ready for the modern workforce.

These are just a few Canadian examples of initiatives that can help people overcome the challenges facing the middle class, and those working hard to join it.

In this globalized and digital age, characterized by economic uncertainty and the constancy of change, it is understandable that many people feel anxious.

Therefore, as Parliamentarians, it is our duty to hear the concerns, respond to the questions, and help the people who trust us to best represent them.

In Canada, Parliament welcomes the participation of all individuals in the decision-making processes affecting their lives.

A grassroots initiative recently led to a Member of Parliament to propose legislation that aims to establish a Gender Equality Week.

Another recent piece of legislation before our Parliament would require publicly traded companies in Canada to disclose the number of women on their corporate boards and in senior management, as well as their policies on diversity.

Similar efforts involve working with our neighbours and partners to create, for example, the United States–Canada Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders.

But, in a representative democracy, our role is also about bringing forward all voices, including the voice, energy and insight of young people.

For example, this past International Women's Day, 338 young women from all over the country took their seat in the House of Commons and spoke to issues that concerned them and their community.

This initiative marked a century of women's suffrage in Canada, but also underlined the need to elect more women in Parliament.

In addition, intergenerational interactions foster new ideas and more inclusive perspectives that allow for better decision-making.

This commitment to inclusiveness also extends to Canada's reconciliation efforts with our Indigenous peoples.

In 2008, the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government of Canada delivered in Parliament the *Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools* acknowledging one of the darkest chapters of Canada's history.

The commitment to a journey of healing, reconciliation and recovery to remedy some of the harm done by the schools and to forge a new relationship with Indigenous communities is ongoing.

As such, in May 2016, Canada committed to implementing, without reservations, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

Canada took another important step in August 2016 by launching an inquiry into the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

This brings me to my final point: respect for human rights is critical to ensuring a development process that is inclusive and lasting.

In too many countries, human rights are paid rhetorical credence, but ignored in daily situations.

Embedding human rights obligations in national and international approaches to development guards against marginalization, exclusion and arbitrary decision-making.

In essence, ensuring that human rights are a core aspect of our development work promotes fairness and human dignity.

To conclude, I hope these examples from Canada help to highlight how positive efforts to include marginalized groups, such as women, young people and Indigenous people, in all decision-making processes can redress inequality and ensure a more inclusive and fair society.

I am pleased to be part of this debate and I look forward to learning from your experiences in order to work better together in pursuing a more equal world.

Thank you.