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Concept Note

Regional Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of the Asia-Pacific The Role of Young Parliamentarians in Advancing Inclusive and Peaceful Societies and Preventing Violent Extremism

Colombo, 25-26 April 2017

Background

In recent years, the world has witnessed new waves of violent extremism that have taken the lives of many innocent people. Violent extremism is not a new phenomenon in Asia. But there is increasing concern that the international influence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and their methods are bringing new insecurity to the region. Approaches to preventing violent extremism must now look beyond traditional short-term, security-oriented strategies to addressing its drivers at the structural level. Ongoing armed conflict has been identified as the biggest driver of violent extremism. The lack of economic opportunities, particularly the absence of economic growth and the exclusion of parts of society from economic activity, help to create conducive environments for violent extremism. Moreover, political and societal discrimination and the absence of participation in politics and society of certain groups, specifically along ethnic, religious and linguistic lines, create grievances, which in turn translate into a higher likelihood of violent extremism. Prevention strategies must, therefore, incorporate long-term changes to address these issues, including by: strengthening respect for human rights and the rule of law; increasing the participation of women, youth and excluded groups in decision-making and prevention strategies; eliminating discrimination and inequality; and engaging those at the mid- and grassroots levels to address extremism and societal divisions. Furthermore, efforts to counter violent extremism increasingly suggest that young people should be specifically targeted. Indeed, the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, adopted in December 2015, acknowledges that *"we will not be successful unless we can harness the idealism, creativity and energy of young people and others who feel disenfranchised"*.

Parliaments have a key role to play in preventing violent extremism (PVE). In addition to ratifying international conventions, they scrutinize and adopt the laws that not only provide the framework for national policies but also apply UN conventions and resolutions. They oversee the enforcement of these laws, identify implementation gaps and hold the executive branch of government to account. Moreover, as representatives of the people they have the responsibility to ensure that decision-making is inclusive based on engagement of all societal groups, including the disadvantaged and marginalized. They also have the capacity to generate political will and provide a space for a wide range of civil society stakeholders to engage in debate. The success of preventive measures largely depends on the ability of parliaments to carry out these functions. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have consistently supported parliaments to fulfil these responsibilities while fostering international dialogue. Young parliamentarians, as representatives closest to a



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country's youth populations, have a particularly crucial role to play.

From the perspective of addressing the root causes of extremism, prevention is directly linked to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) vis-a vis which parliaments have a crucial role to play at the national level. Again, through their legislative, oversight, and representation functions, parliaments can advance sustainable development and respond to challenges that are relevant to youth, including inequality, demographic change, urbanization and migration. As political leaders of today's youth, young parliamentarians are uniquely placed to lead the way towards sustainable, equitable and fair development. Indeed, the participants of the IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians held in Lusaka in March 2016 concluded that "without the contribution and leadership of young people, we affirm that Agenda 2030 cannot be achieved." UNDP, in Asia-Pacific and worldwide, is promoting and supporting youth empowerment, leadership and participation in political processes and the SDGs

Today's youth have come of age in an environment of unprecedented potential for their empowerment and engagement. They live in an interconnected world transformed by technological advances. This gives them the opportunity to participate in transformative actions in and beyond the communities in which they live. However, the majority of young people have yet to be meaningfully engaged in processes and institutions responsible for progressing their own development, such as parliaments. This is particularly the case in Asia, where 40 per cent of the population was less than 25 years of age in 2015. IPU research has revealed that in 2016 only 1.1 per cent of parliamentarians were under 30 years old and 10.1 per cent under 40 in lower chambers and unicameral parliaments in the region. It also showed that only 0.3 per cent of the parliamentarians sitting in Asian upper houses were aged under 30 and 7.9 per cent of them were under 40 years old.

Actively engaging young people is imperative to prevent violent extremism and successfully implement the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 16 ("*promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels*"). To meet this Goal, creating and building long-term trust and engagement in national institutions is critical, especially among young men and women. Furthermore, transparent and innovative forms of communication between institutions, government representatives, young people and their communities need to be enhanced as well.

In light of this, UNDP, the IPU and the Parliament of Sri Lanka are jointly convening a regional meeting (25-26 April 2017) of young parliamentarians in the Asia-Pacific region to engage on PVE. This event will bring together young parliamentarians from across the region, PVE specialists, private sector representatives and youth advocates. It will build awareness of PVE issues among policymakers, identify what young parliamentarians should do to tackle PVE and propose how to increase communication and coordination between parliaments and young people to prevent violent extremism.



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Objectives of the Meeting

This Regional Meeting will explore ways in which young parliamentarians in the Asia-Pacific region could cooperate and interact sustainably and facilitate knowledge transfer on PVE. It will:

- Engage young MPs on the challenges and strategies of preventing violent extremism in the Asia-Pacific region;
- Empower young MPs by building their capacity, informing their parliamentary actions and offering opportunities for networking and cooperation;
- Enhance partnerships between parliamentarians and young people to increase youth political participation and address PVE.

A central objective of the meeting will be to encourage interaction between young parliamentarians and youth representatives through working groups on specific PVE-related topics facilitated by thematic experts. Gender equality will be a core theme underpinning all discussions in the meeting. A specific panel will also be dedicated the role of gender equality in PVE.

Organization of proceedings

This regional meeting will gather Members of Parliament from approximately 40 countries and IPU Associate Members and Observers that work on youth-related matters. Regional youth associations, organizations, youth parliaments, PVE specialists, civil society and the private sector will also participate.

The meeting will be made up of a series of panel-led discussions to build awareness on PVE issues. A diversity of opinion and expertise will be ensured by allocating speaking positions to representatives from various strands of society. Key questions for consideration, presented by discussion moderators, will inform and guide discussions throughout the event.

In keeping with standard IPU practice, all participants will have equal speaking rights. So that discussions are as vibrant and dynamic as possible, the following rules will apply:

- There will be no list of speakers on any agenda item.
- Participants are asked not to read out prepared statements, but rather engage in lively discussions. Subject to arrangements that chairpersons of sessions may make to suit



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the circumstances, oral contributions may not exceed three minutes. Participants may speak several times on each item, particularly to respond to other statements.

- The meeting sessions will include presentations by experts and resource persons, debates, and interactive discussion panels in moderated plenary sessions. There will also be group breakout sessions.

Language

The regional meeting will be conducted in English. A limited number of interpretation booths will be available for rent for those national delegations that wish to bring their own interpreters (please see the practical information note for the meeting).

About the organizers

The IPU promotes youth empowerment through parliament as a key element of democracy and inclusive, efficient political processes. The IPU is a source of expertise on both the functioning of parliament and youth participation. The IPU supports parliaments in opening up to youth and integrating their perspectives into parliamentary work. The IPU also assists parliaments in matters of peace and security. As an organization founded on the premise of dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution, the IPU supports parliaments by fostering parliamentary diplomacy, working towards reconciliation through dialogue and inclusiveness, and strengthening efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

UNDP promotes and supports youth empowerment, leadership and participation in political processes, peacebuilding and the SDGs, through various country-level and regional initiatives. As the largest implementer of parliamentary assistance in the world, UNDP helps parliaments at both the national and sub-national levels to fulfill their mandate to implement Agenda 2030 and the SDGs through the provision of technical expertise and peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge. To help prevent violent extremism, UNDP focuses on exploring the drivers of violent extremism, both in general and at the regional level.

The Parliament of Sri Lanka has played an important role in reconciliation efforts within the country and in preventing violent extremism. The Parliament is committed to promoting and overseeing the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the SDGs and has started playing a significant role in that regard. It has also further engaged youth in the work of the parliament through workshops and interaction with the Sri Lankan youth parliament. Of its 225 Members of Parliament, 2.4 per cent are under the age of 30 and 29.7 per cent younger than 45.