



Promoting child nutrition in East and South Asia

Regional parliamentary seminar hosted by the National Assembly of Lao People's Democratic Republic and co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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Opening statement

Ms. Farkhunda Zahra Naderi
President of the IPU Standing Committee on Democracy
and Human Rights and member of the Afghan Parliament

Madam President of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honor for me to speak on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the world organization of national parliaments.

I would like to express my gratitude to you, Madam President, for your parliament's decision to host this important regional parliamentary seminar on nutrition. I would like to thank in particular the national organizing committee headed by Mr. Phonetep, who has worked tirelessly to make this meeting a success. I would also like to thank our longstanding partner UNICEF for their firm support to the organization of this event.

Distinguished participants,

The IPU started in 2001 to assist parliaments in their efforts to enhance respect for children's rights. The landmark IPU resolution adopted that year – entitled Protecting and caring for children, the driving force of future society - provided the foundation for that work. Since then, the IPU has implemented thematic campaigns and provided capacity-building to parliaments with a view to eliminating child trafficking and labour, violence against children and female genital mutilation. The IPU has also promoted parliamentary involvement in putting into practice the UN Convention on Rights of the Child and developed in partnership with UNICEF parliamentary information tools on key children's issues.

Our commitment to children's rights continues to this day. In fact, IPU's current strategy gives great prominence to the promotion and protection of children's well-being.

Since 2010 these efforts have increasingly focused on enhancing parliamentary action to ensure better nutrition.

Almost half of all children in the developing world who die before reaching their fifth birthday, die because they do not have enough nutritious food and essential vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin A and zinc, to fight off disease. Millions more become permanently mentally and physically disabled because of inadequate nutrition. Pregnant women who suffer from under-nutrition have a

higher risk of complications and death, as do their babies. Beyond these human tragedies, there are also economic implications—researchers believe that these deaths and disabilities also reduce a country's economic potential by at least 8 percent due to lost productivity.

We know that timely and straightforward interventions can have a real impact. Indeed, research has proven that children who receive adequate nutrition, particularly during their mother's pregnancy and until they are two years old—referred to by experts as the "1000 days window of opportunity"—are less likely to die or fall ill.

In light of the potential for action and our collective obligation to act, the IPU has since 2010 started to assist parliaments in several countries in to create an enabling environment for children this critical phase to achieve their full potential. Moreover, the fight against malnutrition has been the subject of debate and action at our IPU Assemblies. It featured prominently on the agenda at our Assembly in Uganda in 2012. On that occasion, panel discussions, field visits and a resolution underscored the political message that parliamentarians can do much to promote a pro-nutrition agenda.

Next year the Committee that I chair at the IPU will take a close look at implementation of the IPU's 2012 landmark resolution on access to health as a basic right and the role of parliament in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children. In 2015, my committee will also look at how the Convention on the Rights of the Child has shaped and improved the lives of children 25 years after it entered into force.

Distinguished participants,

The workshop that takes place here over the next three days is a continuation of our efforts to enable parliamentarians to become strong advocates for nutrition. Indeed, it is our belief that parliamentarians can play a critical role in adopting the right legislation, holding their governments to account, allocating financial resources and, as leaders within their communities, raising awareness about nutrition.

The IPU is keen to use and present the outcome of this workshop at the Second International Conference on Nutrition which will take place later this month in Rome. I also personally hope that the outcome of the workshop will enrich the discussions of my fellow parliamentarians taking part in my committee meeting next year and will inspire them to take action.

Indeed, it is our hope that the workshop will help to identify concrete steps that parliaments can take to promote a pro-nutrition agenda and that the results will underscore your commitment to promoting a pro-nutrition agenda for children. As we celebrate this year the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child children deserve no less.

Thank you.