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**STATEMENT BY THE RT. HON. EBENEZER SEKYI HUGHES,
SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF GHANA,
REPRESENTING THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

Committee of the Whole, UNCTAD XII

(Accra, 21 April 2008)

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to thank you most warmly for inviting the IPU to contribute to your deliberations. It represents an important acknowledgement of the key responsibilities that members of parliament have to articulate in advancing a vision of human development in all its dimensions. As the Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, let me also extend to all of you my warmest welcome to our country.

The IPU is not a political development agency and does not specialize in international trade. It is a global organization representing some 150 national parliaments. To put it in the lingo of economics that is common currency in this hall, the IPU is in the business of building political capital to help achieve peace and democracy, and their attendants of development and human rights.

Indeed, just like trade and development have become intertwined in this age of globalization, development and democracy too have come to form two sides of the same coin. The complex edifice of development will always be fragile if it lacks strong foundations in democracy; but democracy without development is like an abandoned building site where one stares down at the strong foundations and wonders what will become of them if nothing is built on top. This is why we are very much involved in development issues.

A most recent show of our commitment to development came just a few days ago, at our 118th Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa, where hundreds of parliamentarians came together for a debate on "pushing back the frontiers of poverty." At the conclusion of the Assembly, our members adopted a parliamentary message to UNCTAD XII as a formal contribution to this important conference. Copies of the message should be available in this room.

Mr. President,

Many positive changes have occurred or taken root around the world, and especially in the developing countries, in the four years since the last UNCTAD session. However, we should not delude ourselves. Most countries are off track to achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, with sub-Saharan Africa lagging way behind the pack to the point that the region may fail in almost all of the goals.

We should all worry about the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, both within and among countries. Exclusion, inequality and social isolation are the cancer of the body politic. Upon closer inspection, the generally positive economic report card of the last four years is also spotty. Among other things, the employment intensity of economic growth is weak and productivity gains are not fairly distributed to workers; investments flows remain geographically skewed and the agricultural sector continues to be neglected relative to the rest of the economy

On the environment too, an incredible amount of work remains to be done for developing countries to set themselves on a more sustainable course. To mention just two huge outstanding issues, it is most lamentable that some two billion people still lack electricity, and that clean potable water is becoming a commodity for the few. Developing countries and the poor in general are already paying a disproportionate price for the environmental damage caused by climate change.

The IPU has embraced trade liberalization as a driver of economic growth and development. Our goal in the last few years has been to facilitate the completion of a multilateral trade regime through the Doha Round of the WTO. We are working to improve understanding among parliamentarians of the many issues on the table as a way of breaking the current impasse in the negotiations. Policy-wise, we have called for more aid for trade to enable developing countries to exploit fully their trading potential, as well as for the full implementation of the commitment made to Least Developed Countries for duty-free and quota-free market access. While acknowledging the overall lowering of tariffs, we decry the pernicious growth of non-tariff barriers and subsidies, especially in those sectors that are most important to the developing countries.

The Doha Round will only succeed if it is open and transparent. This is why a few years ago, together with the European Parliament, we created a Parliamentary Conference on the WTO. Now that the Conference has taken hold, it regularly brings together MPs from both developed and developing countries to promote dialogue, break down some of the fears that beset trade debates at the national level, and help demystify what are often overly technical questions.

Next to trade, more financing is required to help countries on the road to development. Just last week, at our Assembly in Cape Town, our members adopted a comprehensive resolution that provides detailed prescriptions to improve the ownership, alignment, harmonization, and accountability of aid in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The IPU is also working directly with the new Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC to bring parliaments closer to that process which we hope will also give rise to concrete parliamentary initiatives on the ground.

Another critical area where we believe more needs to be done to move development forward has to do with the economic and political roles of women. At a minimum, we need stronger

laws and labor standards to guarantee property rights to women, as well as equal pay for equal work. Economic and social policies should be more explicitly targeted to them, particularly through the budgetary process, as should foreign aid. On the political front, where women occupy only 17.9 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide, progress toward equality remains too slow except in a few stellar cases. Achieving gender equality in politics is again a good illustration of how democracy supports development, in that as long as women are not fairly represented in decision-making it is hard to imagine how development policies will take account of their particular needs. Over the last few years we have therefore stepped up our efforts in this domain with more workshops and publications for parliamentarians, and with a public awareness campaign on the role of women in politics – all of which were often done in cooperation with the United Nations.

When all is said and done in the areas I have mentioned so far, development efforts will still fail if they are not aimed at creating more decent work for all. Fairly remunerated, safe and decent work is the single most important determinant of sound development. It is also the most important underpinning to citizens' empowerment and political participation.

The IPU therefore supports wholeheartedly the Decent Work agenda spearheaded by the ILO. We share the view that this agenda needs to be placed at the center of national development policies like never before. We need a greater commitment at all levels of decision-making to more investments in people so that they can either find or create the jobs they want. In particular, we have called for policies that support entrepreneurship at the micro, small and medium levels. Small businesses, whether formal or informal, are the future of the developing world and the best way forward.

Mr. President,

All trade and development issues ultimately rest on a political equation. This is why our entry point to development issues will continue to come from democracy building to ensure that all people, including the poor and minorities, are fairly represented in decision-making and that the political process as a whole is open, transparent and accountable. Parliaments that are free and fairly elected, and fully enabled to exercise their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions may not be a sufficient condition to achieve development, but they are certainly a necessary one.

Thank you.