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Mr. Melvin Bouva

President of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians

Opening remarks

6th Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians
9-10 September, Asuncion, Paraguay

Dear Mr. President of the Congress of Paraguay,

Dear Madam President of the IPU,

Dear Mr. Enrique, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Paraguay,

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be here with you today for the 6th Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians. I wish to thank the Congress of Paraguay for hosting this event. As Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Suriname, it brings me great joy to see the IPU youth movement now officially landed on our continent. Thank you for hosting us here in Paraguay Mr. Speaker!

This Conference is also special for me for another reason. I have participated in many of these events in the past, but this is my first Conference as President of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians. I was elected in April, which means that I actually have not even yet presided over a meeting of the Forum. So I hope you enjoy this sneak peak. But joking aside, I am deeply honoured to have been elected, and to be here with you all today.

Dear colleagues,

This Conference is about well-being and using a well-being approach to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. Over the course of today, we will hear about how well-being and the SDGs are two sides of the same coin. Why you may ask? Because what use is development that does not lead to greater well-being? Is that *real* development? I wouldn't say so. The two go hand in hand.

By focusing policy more on well-being, we are helping achieve the SDGs. We only have 11 years to reach the 2030 targets, and we are far behind. We need to supercharge our efforts, and youth bring the skills and enthusiasm that are needed. After all, it is us that have the largest stake in this. Because we, and our future generations, will be the ones facing the consequences of whether we succeed or fail. We need to assert ourselves now, because one day we will be the older generation, and the world our children live in will depend on the decisions we make today.

We young MPs are ready to take a lead role, and many of us already have. For us to make a stronger difference, we need more of us at the table. But we also need to make a stronger impact once we get there.

I was at the first Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in Geneva in 2014. Five years ago, we laid the foundation for IPU's youth work and for the five Global Conferences that followed. We have come a long way since then and together, we've made great strides.

- The Global Conferences have made a name for themselves, drawing the attention of the parliamentary, the youth, and the international communities. They have also cemented young MPs as key players in the global youth agenda.
- Thanks to our activism, the IPU's statutes were reformed to encourage more young MPs at Assemblies. But it is not only our numbers that have increased: the President of our Forum now holds a permanent seat on the IPU Executive Committee and several young MPs have taken office in IPU standing committees and other bodies.
- Our recommendations to promote youth participation – from quotas, to lowering the ages of eligibility – are now front and centre in global youth efforts.

There is much to celebrate. But we cannot rest on our laurels. As we tie the bow around the first five years, here, in Asuncion, today, I call for us to enter a new chapter for the next five years.

If the last chapter was about setting the foundation for our work, I believe the next one should be about building on this foundation to make something more visible, more concrete, and more impactful. The next five years should be about bringing our vision to reality in our day-to-day work.

One way is by operationalizing our call for greater youth representation. To help mobilize action, last year the IPU Forum of Young MPs set global targets for young MPs in parliaments.

- Today, only 2.2% of young MPs are under 30. We call for this number to grow to 15%.
- Today, only 15% are under 40. We call for this to grow to 35%.
- And finally, today, only 28% of MPs are under 45. We want to see this grow to 45% in the future.

Our targets also call for gender parity in each one of these thresholds.

These targets are a common destination for us to travel towards. But on their own they cannot guarantee our arrival. We also need to rev up our engines to take us there.

One way is through the adoption of laws and policies to empower young men and women. We have spoken about these for years. But in this next chapter, we will promote these on a deeper, more granular level. This year, the IPU researched dozens of youth laws and policies from around the world to better understand what has worked and why.

What we have learned is that often the most impactful policies are those that involve youth throughout the policy process – from design to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. They leverage youth innovation, creativity, and enthusiasm. And by involving youth from the beginning, at the grassroots, the positive impact can be long-lasting and far-reaching, well beyond the policy itself. When youth are involved in a successful project, they are empowered to then take on a new one, or spread success.

Youth involvement in such initiatives is a key to accelerating implementation of the SDGs and empowering youth. It is an investment that pays dividends to our future and to people of all ages.

Next month, at the 141st IPU Assembly in Belgrade, an Award will honour exemplary youth laws and policies in view of spreading these successes to more countries. I invite us all to contribute to spreading the good practices and mobilize further youth-friendly policies and laws in all countries.

Probably the best way to rev up our engines is by empowering those young MPs that are already in office. I know how it feels to be a young MP entering an older generation's arena. Leadership skills are needed, both in our communities, and in our capitals among our peers. Communications skills are also indispensable. Here in Asuncion, we are kicking off a series of skills-building activities to empower ourselves as young MPs. We hope to continue this work in future global conferences of young MPs but also with you at national levels.

We will also continue to enhance our use of modern technologies. I am happy to once again see the Young MPs mobile app at this Conference. I hope all of you have downloaded the App. If you have not, please see someone from the IPU team for support.

Dear colleagues,

I am proud of the work we have done over the last five years. But today is the first day in our new chapter to take things to the next level. I know we are all up for the challenge.

The IPU is ready to support us in our efforts, including in our home countries. Whether it is through advice on a new law, or thematic training for young MPs. Please take advantage of this Conference to voice your needs and share the innovative initiatives you are pursuing.

Colleagues, our time here is limited. Not just in Asuncion, but in our professional life as young MPs well. In the same way that I want to make the most of my opportunity as President of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians to serve youth in general and young MPs in particular over the next two years, I hope that all of you will make the most of your opportunity as well. Let us write this new chapter of the next 5 years together, and take this movement to new heights.

Thank you.