

1. Introduction

The 136th Assembly and Related meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 1 to 5 April 2017 under the theme “***Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all***”

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body that expresses the views of the Inter- Parliamentary Union on political issues. It brings together Parliamentarians to study international problems and make recommendations for actions. Delegations attending IPU assemblies customarily include MPs from all parties from both Houses of Parliament. The IPU Assembly meets twice a year, providing participants with an opportunity to dialogue on issues of international and national concern.

The Namibian delegation was led by Hon. Prof. Peter H. Katjavivi, Speaker of the National Assembly.

The rest of the delegation consisted of the following Members of Parliament:

- Hon. Margaret N. Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council
- Hon. Phillip Haitange Shikongo
- Hon. Michael Shipandeni Shikongo
- Hon. Clara //Gowases
- Hon. Maria Bernadette
- Hon. Veikko Nekundi

Mrs. Juliet Mupurua, Deputy Secretary of the National Council and Ms. Lydia Kandetu, Secretary to the National Assembly attended the Association of Secretaries General (ASGP) meetings.

The parliamentarians were accompanied by Mrs. Elizabeth De Wee (Secretary: IPU National Group), Mr. Norbert Uuyuni (Parliamentary Clerk, National Council), Meriam Nakutwima (Personal Assistant to the Chairperson of the National Council) and Ms. Ripuree Tjitendero, Personal Assistant to the Speaker and Mr. Ekonika Kandume, Security Officer.

2. DELIBERATIONS OF THE IPU ASSEMBLY

2.1 Participation

Delegation from 126 Members Parliaments took part in the work of the Assembly. Of the 1,206 delegates who attended the Assembly, 608 were members of parliament. Those parliamentarians included 42 Presiding Officers, 35 Deputy Presiding Officers and 192 women (31.6%). A list of participants is attached as **Annexure A**

2.2 Inaugural Ceremony

The inaugural ceremony took place on the South Plaza of the Bangladesh Parliament on Saturday 1 April 2017 at 7.30 p.m., with H.E. the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ms. Sheikh Hasina, in attendance.

Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament, welcomed all participants and thanked those who had been involved in the organization of the 136th Assembly. She described some aspects of the geography, history, culture, cuisine and folklore of Dhaka and of Bangladesh. She hoped that delegates would be able to get to know more about some of those aspects of the country. She noted some of Bangladesh's achievements since it had gained independence, relating to increasing GDP, eradicating poverty, working towards gender parity, improving health outcomes,

investing in technology and contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She underlined the importance of the Constitution, the rule of law and parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.

She further stressed it was important for parliamentarians to address the challenges currently facing the world, including globalization, the gap between the developed and developing countries and climate change. Part of addressing those challenges would involve engaging young people in democratic processes and ensuring that organizations such as the IPU continued to allow parliamentarians and others across the world to discuss, exchange good practices and develop shared visions. She called for the political language of those present to enable the building of an equitable, inclusive and peaceful world.

Mr. Miroslav Jenca, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, read out a message from the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. A. Guterres. As a former parliamentarian, Mr. Guterres attached great importance to maintaining close ties between the United Nations and the IPU. Legislators had the power to turn aspirations into action, and were crucial links between local and global affairs. He outlined his priorities as Secretary-General, which included improving living conditions through the SDGs, implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change and reforming the UN peace and security architecture so as to better serve the world's population. He welcomed the Assembly's focus on increasing social cohesion and reducing inequality, as the exclusion and hardship associated with inequality often led to cycles of insecurity and violence. He called for the creation of a more compassionate, inclusive and peaceful world.

Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, welcomed all those present and thanked everyone involved in the planning and running of the Assembly. He was humbled that his country was hosting such a well-attended IPU Assembly in his home town. The Assembly was the largest international event ever held in Bangladesh and would tackle some of the most pressing issues on the global parliamentary agenda. He evoked the successes of Bangladesh: it was making great strides in gender equality, was increasingly resilient to climate change, was trading successfully in textiles across the world, had lifted 50 million people out of poverty and was now self-sufficient in food.

He recalled the IPU's central values of pluralism, diversity and inclusiveness, its strong cooperation with the United Nations, and its close involvement with many major decisions of the international community, including the adoption of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. He reaffirmed the IPU's commitment to a two-State solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, peace on Korean Peninsula, an end to the conflict in Syria, a solution to the crisis in Yemen and an end to the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. He also expressed the IPU's concern about news from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that the powers of the legislature were in danger of being usurped.

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, expressed his wholehearted thanks to the Parliament, Government and people of Bangladesh for their generosity in hosting the 136th IPU Assembly. He outlined a number of issues that would take centre stage during the Assembly, particularly gender equality. Bangladesh was making significant progress in this area, from which other countries could learn a lot. People often assessed the benefits of hosting an IPU Assembly in economic and financial terms only. However, the cultural benefits and goodwill generated could not be overlooked. He looked forward to fruitful discussions about how parliamentarians could take action to improve people's well-being. The Assembly should recommend specific, actionable outcomes on how to tackle inequality of all types.

H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, said that her country was honoured to host the 136th Assembly. She described Bangladesh's journey since 1971 towards democracy, and stressed that democracy was the only means of ensuring prosperity and security.

She outlined some of the efforts made to build a democratic and just society in Bangladesh, including by strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring an independent and vibrant media. She also noted the considerable socioeconomic progress that Bangladesh had achieved, including the fact that the poverty rate was almost 10 per cent lower than it had been in 2010, and that average life expectancy now stood at 72 years. She called for concerted action to tackle hunger and threats such as terrorism and climate change, and trusted that the Assembly's fruitful outcomes would be implemented at the national level.

2.3 Election of the President of the 136th Assembly

The first plenary sitting of the 136th IPU Assembly opened at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in the morning of Sunday 2 April, with the election of Ms. Shirin S. Chaudhury, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh, as President of the Assembly.

2.4 Emergency item

Choice of an emergency item

The President informed the Assembly that the following four requests for the inclusion of an emergency item had been proposed:

- *Tougher migration policies around the world and the risk of human rights violations (Mexico);*
- *The legalization of settlements by the Israeli Regulation Law: A violation of international law (Palestine, on behalf of the Arab Group);*
- *Urgent international action to save millions of people from famine and drought in parts of Africa and Yemen (Merged proposal - Belgium, Kenya and the United Kingdom);*
- *Preoccupation about recent events in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Argentina).*

The delegations of Belgium, Kenya and the United Kingdom had submitted individual proposals all dealing with the subject of famine in parts of Africa and Yemen and subsequently merged these proposals into the one mentioned above. The delegation of Argentina withdrew its proposal before the vote.

The Assembly proceeded with a roll-call vote on three items. The proposal put forward jointly by Belgium, Kenya and the United Kingdom was adopted and added to the agenda.

3. Debates and decisions of the Assembly and its Standing Committees

3.1 General Debate on *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all*

High-level segment

The General Debate was introduced by a number of prominent speakers, including **Ms. S.S. Chaudhury (Bangladesh), in her capacity as President of the 136th Assembly**, introduced the theme of the General Debate, *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all*. She said that rising levels of inequality undermined human rights and opportunity for all. Increasing inequality had a direct impact on human well-being and was a precursor of economic, social and political instability. In 2015, the international community had agreed to respond and take decisive action on that front. In particular, SDG 10 called on States to "reduce inequalities within and among countries". She invited parliamentarians to discuss the impact of economic, social and political inequality on the poor, women and vulnerable groups in their countries. She also encouraged

delegates to share their national experiences in tackling such inequalities and to describe specific policy proposals that had been considered to effectively address the problem, both within and among countries.

Ms. M. Mensah-Williams (Namibia), President of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, provided a gender perspective on the overall theme of the General Debate. She underscored the issues that parliamentarians should prioritize as they sought to redress inequality at all levels: eliminating any gender inequality that still prevailed in national legislation; enabling parliaments to meaningfully deliver on gender equality; and making economic equality a reality for all women. To deliver on dignity and well-being for all, it was imperative to respond to the needs of women in crisis situations, women migrants and refugees, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, and young and elderly women.

Mr. K. Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Honorary President of the Global March against Child Labour, addressed the Assembly as a keynote speaker. For over 25 years, he had been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitation. Mr. Satyarthi had helped liberate close to 85,000 children from exploitation and had developed a successful model for their education, rehabilitation and reintegration into mainstream society.

Using concrete examples from his work all over the world, he highlighted the dramatic plight of children, such as those working in cocoa bean fields, or the teenage mother he had met who had asked him to help her child, as it was too late for her. He called upon parliamentarians to use their power as representatives of the people to make a difference within the framework of the SDGs. He asked them on behalf of all children to return to their parliaments and prioritize the child-oriented goals. He said that reducing inequality could only begin by securing a better future for all children and making sure that no one was left behind.

A revolution began with small steps and he challenged parliamentarians to overcome their political and ideological differences and to unite in their compassion for children and to take determined action to ensure children's dignity and well-being. He introduced his *100 million* campaign which aimed to support the largest youth-to-youth mobilization in history to end the exploitation of over 100 million children. He encouraged parliamentarians to actively take part in the *Decision Makers Back to School Day* on 20 September 2017 - www.100million.org/parliamentarians - in order to listen to young people and learn what they, as parliamentarians, could do to change the lives of the world's most marginalized children, end child labour, ensure education for all and eradicate violence against children. The voices of young people around the world needed to be heard by those who represented them.

That message was later reinforced by **Ms. G. Verburg, a former parliamentarian** from the Netherlands, who was currently the Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and UN Assistant Secretary-General. She said that, with leadership from governments and support from organizations and individuals, the SUN Movement aimed to end malnutrition in all its forms and mobilize global action to ensure that every child, adolescent, mother and family could realize their right to food and nutrition, reach their full potential, and help shape sustainable and prosperous societies. Parliaments and parliamentarians were called upon to play a critical role in reaching those objectives. The IPU Secretary General had been actively involved in that campaign. It was made clear that parliaments should use their legislative and budgetary functions to enable countries to make the best possible investment in the future of their societies, namely investment in children's education, nutrition and health.

During the three days of deliberations, over 100 legislators from 88 national parliaments, including 29 Presiding Officers, as well as representatives of 11 partner organizations, contributed to the General Debate. The key messages and policy recommendations from the General Debate were

reflected in the outcome document, the *Dhaka Communiqué*.

The Assembly took place against the backdrop of dramatic events in other parts of the world. On 4 April, the Assembly observed a minute of silence in honour of the victims of the terrorist attack that had occurred in a metro station in St. Petersburg on the previous day. On 5 April, a minute of silence was observed in memory of the innocent victims of the atrocious chemical weapons attack in Syria. The IPU President reiterated the Organization's strong condemnation of all acts of terrorism and violent extremism, and called for the perpetrators of such acts to be brought to justice.

3.2 Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security held four sittings from 2 to 4 April. At its first sitting, the Committee considered an explanatory memorandum and a draft resolution entitled *The role of parliament in preventing outside interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States*, jointly drafted by the co-Rapporteurs Ms. S. Koutra-Koukouma (Cyprus) and Mr. K. Kosachev (Russian Federation). It also considered 143 proposed amendments to the draft resolution submitted by 18 Member Parliaments.

The first of those was an amendment to reject the entire resolution without considering the other amendments. That proposal was rejected by the Committee. Forty per cent of the proposed amendments and sub-amendments were approved. At its sitting on 4 April, the Committee adopted the revised text by a vote, with 44 in favour, 10 against and one abstention. The delegations of Canada, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Ukraine expressed their objection to the entire resolution during the explanation of votes. The delegation of Germany expressed its reservation to the entire resolution in writing.

The revised draft resolution, as endorsed by the Committee, was submitted to the Assembly, meeting in plenary, in the afternoon of 5 April, and was adopted by consensus. The title of the resolution was amended by the Assembly to *The role of parliament in respecting the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States*. Following adoption by the Assembly, the President of the Twelve Plus Group expressed the reservations of the delegations of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom to the entire resolution.

The Bureau agreed to focus its work at the 137th Assembly on the following activities: an expert hearing on the theme chosen by the Committee for debate; a panel discussion on the role of parliament in monitoring the action of national armed forces participating in UN peacekeeping operations; and a panel discussion on implementation of a previous resolution on cyberwarfare (Hanoi, 2015).

3.3 Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade held its sittings on 2, 3 and 4 April with its President, Ms. S. Tioulong (Cambodia), in the chair. The Standing Committee had before it an explanatory memorandum and draft resolution, entitled *Promoting enhanced international cooperation on the SDGs, in particular on the financial inclusion of women as a driver of development*, jointly prepared by the co-Rapporteurs, Mr. N.K. Premachandran (India) and Ms. G. Cuevas (Mexico). It also had before it 82 amendments to the draft resolution submitted by 15 Member Parliaments, as well as amendments from the Forum of Women Parliamentarians.

The Committee first heard a presentation by Mr. A. Lopez-Claros of the World Bank. That was followed by a presentation of the draft resolution by the co-Rapporteurs and a debate. A total of 21

speakers took the floor. The Standing Committee then proceeded to consider the proposed amendments in two plenary sittings.

At its final sitting on 4 April, the Standing Committee unanimously adopted the consolidated draft to which no delegation had expressed a reservation. The Committee agreed that its President would present the draft resolution to the Assembly.

The draft resolution was submitted to the Assembly at its plenary sitting in the afternoon of 5 April and was adopted unanimously. The Standing Committee adopted its next subject item, *Engaging the private sector in implementing the SDGs, especially on renewable energy*. The Committee approved the nomination of Mr. A. Gryffroy (Belgium) as a co-Rapporteur and entrusted the IPU President with holding consultations to identify another co-Rapporteur.

3.4 Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The Standing Committee elected two new members to the Bureau: Mr. A. Niyongabo (Burundi) on behalf of the African Group and Mr. S. Spengemann (Canada) on behalf of the Twelve Plus Group. The Committee took note of the decision of the IPU President to nominate Mr. N. Schrijver (Netherlands) as a rapporteur for the Committee's next resolution. It further decided to nominate Ms. S. Dev (India) as a rapporteur, in order to ensure gender and youth balance. Mr. Schrijver and Ms. Dev would share this responsibility with Mr. I. Umakhanov (Russian Federation), who had been appointed rapporteur at the previous Assembly.

The Standing Committee held a preparatory debate on the theme of the next resolution, *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*. The IPU Secretary General recalled some of the key provisions of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, which the IPU had adopted in 1997. He said that core principles such as human rights, the rule of law and the equal participation of women and men remained fully relevant. Many things had changed since 1997: there had been an enormous expansion in digital technologies, and there was increasing concern about levels of public trust and youth participation in politics.

During the debate, 25 delegates shared their perspectives on the challenges and priorities for parliamentary action to strengthen democracy. They provided valuable input for the rapporteurs to draw upon as they drafted the text of the resolution.

The Committee held an interactive debate entitled *Act now for adolescents: The role of parliamentarians in promoting adolescent health and well-being*. Participants included experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), civil society and the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. It was noted that as many as one million adolescent girls and boys died every year. Hundreds of millions more developed unhealthy habits that would adversely affect their future health. For example, tobacco use often began during adolescence; and teenage girls might miss school because they did not have access to the sanitary products they needed during their menstrual periods.

During the conclusion of the debate, it was noted that parliamentary oversight was instrumental to ensuring that laws relating to adolescents were effectively implemented and that services reached those who were most in need. Parliamentarians should speak out about the needs and concerns of adolescent girls and boys, including lesbian and gay adolescents, so that they could get on the path to a healthy and happy adult life.

3.5 Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

During its first sitting on 4 April 2017, three new members were elected to the Bureau: Mr. S. Gavrilov

(Russian Federation); Ms. C. Crexell (Argentina); and Mr. A. Toumi (Morocco), who would finish the mandate of Ms. R. Benmassaoud (Morocco) as she was no longer a parliamentarian.

The Committee discussed parliamentary follow-up of the SDGs in preparation for the 2017 session of the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. Panellists included: Mr. S. Mukerjee (Country Director, United Nations Development Programme, Bangladesh), Mr. M.F. Rabbi Miah (Bangladesh) and Ms. J. Luveni (Fiji). Mr. A. Avsan, President of the Standing Committee, was also a panellist.

During the discussions, it was suggested that priorities should be reoriented so as to take into account and measure happiness. It was important to ensure that the needs and interests of the most vulnerable sectors of society were considered and properly addressed. Efforts aimed at enhancing resilience were unlikely to succeed if 50 per cent of the population was not included in resilience analysis or planning.

On 3 April, four Bureau members - Mr. A. Avsan (Sweden), Mr. S. Chibeb (Algeria), Mr. D. Dawson (Canada) and Mr. A. Toumi (Morocco) - met members of the UN Country Team, led by the Resident Coordinator, Mr. R. Watkins. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. M. Jenca, also attended.

The group reviewed the work of the UN development system in Bangladesh and the practical ways in which the UN Country Team interacted with the Government and Parliament of Bangladesh. The four members also visited two UNICEF schools, one for four-year-olds and one for teenagers. The visit built on previous IPU field missions aimed at examining how UN Country Teams were working with parliaments not merely as recipients of technical assistance but also as development partners in their own right. Much of the discussion revolved around UN Country Team work to support the implementation of the SDGs in Bangladesh – one of the 44 countries participating in the voluntary review at the 2017 edition of the HLPF.

3.6 Debate on the emergency item

Urgent international action to save millions of people from famine and drought in parts of Africa and Yemen

A total of 15 speakers took the floor. Before the debate, Belgium, a co-author of the merged proposal, reiterated the urgent need to take action on climate change, one of the major causes of the famine, and the need to take coordinated action to stem the conflict occurring in some of the countries affected by the famine.

Participants were unanimous in reaffirming the urgent need to take immediate action on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Yemen. They expressed their concern for and solidarity with millions of people who were facing the very real threat of starvation due to famine and drought, and dire circumstances of food insecurity.

Parliamentarians underscored the need for a better strategy to tackle the root causes of the famine, namely climate change and conflict, and insisted that famine must not be used as a weapon of war. Some of the delegates reiterated the need to promote democracy, adding that countries in a stable democracy were in a better position to deal with famine. Various delegations also recalled the important role parliaments and parliamentarians could play in the fight against the famine, and urged parliamentarians to step up pressure on their governments for their immediate action on the issue.

Several delegates underlined that more investment was needed for agriculture, irrigation, and support for the agricultural industry and for farmers so as to ensure stable food production. They urged parliaments to ensure that a sufficient percentage of the budget was allocated to agriculture.

Several speakers also underscored that food waste should be avoided. One delegate quoted Mahatma Gandhi "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

A delegate from the United Kingdom reminded participants that the world was facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the creation of the United Nations in 1945. He pointed out that UN figures related to four countries only (Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen) and that millions more were suffering from hunger elsewhere. He quoted the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs "... people will simply starve to death without collective and coordinated international efforts", and urged parliamentarians to bring pressure to bear on their respective governments to take immediate action to deal with the famine.

3.7 Adoption of the resolution on the emergency item

The plenary sitting of the Assembly adopted the resolution by consensus. Following the adoption of the resolution, the delegation of India expressed its reservations on preambular paragraphs 5 and 6 and operative paragraphs 6 and 11 respectively.

4. Concluding sitting

The Assembly met for its concluding sitting. Mr. S. Kinga (Bhutan) provided an overview of the salient findings and recommendations of the General Debate, as reflected in the Dhaka Communiqué. That outcome document of the General Debate on *Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all* was endorsed by the Assembly.

The resolution prepared by the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security, *The role of parliament in respecting the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States*, was adopted by consensus. The resolution prepared by the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, *Promoting enhanced international cooperation on the SDGs, in particular on the financial inclusion of women as a driver of development*, was adopted unanimously. The Presidents of the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights and of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs presented the reports of their deliberations, which were noted by the Assembly.

The subject items to be taken up by the First and Second Standing Committees for the following one-year cycle were approved by the Assembly, as were the co-Rapporteurs for the respective subject items. The Assembly reconfirmed the amendments to the IPU Statutes and Rules, as recommended by the Executive Committee and approved earlier by the Governing Council.

The representatives of the geopolitical groups welcomed the substantive outcomes of the Assembly, as well as the warm hospitality and excellent organization provided by Bangladesh as host. Ms. R. Alitwala Kadaga (Uganda) on behalf of the African Group, Mr. R. El Abdi (Morocco) on behalf of the Arab Group, Mr. D. Pacheco (Portugal) on behalf of the Twelve Plus Group, Ms. E. Mendoza Fernández (Bolivia) on behalf of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), Mr. K. Kosachev (Russian Federation) on behalf of the Eurasia Group and Mr. R.K. Singh (India) on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, all offered warm words of appreciation and congratulations for a highly successful IPU Assembly.

The IPU Secretary General expressed his gratitude to all Members of the IPU for their support and confidence, as evidenced by the unanimous decision of the Governing Council to entrust him with a second four-year term of office. He pledged that he and his team would do their utmost to take forward the decisions of the IPU Members and effectively implement the IPU's new Strategy. He also pledged to modernize the IPU, mobilize parliaments around the SDGs and challenges such as violent extremism and terrorism. He underscored the need for parliaments to be more inclusive in order to

become more effective. Lastly, he thanked the IPU President and Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament for being such gracious hosts of the Assembly.

The IPU President underscored the importance of the IPU Assembly for Bangladesh and its people. It had been an historic event that had lifted the nation, garnered the respect of the global community and provided renewed confidence and national pride. It had been the first "green" IPU Assembly insofar as its carbon footprint had been calculated and would be offset by a series of environmentally friendly initiatives. Live coverage of the Assembly had been provided for the first time through IPU TV. It was the first time that women's representation in the Executive Committee had risen to one third. The participation of young MPs in the IPU's governing bodies had also been institutionalized. The presence of parliamentary leaders in Dhaka in such high numbers, despite the security concerns, had reconfirmed the victory of hope over fear and had taken parliamentary solidarity to a new height.

In her concluding remarks, Ms. S.S. Chaudhury, President of the Assembly and Speaker of the host Parliament, provided an overview of the key outcomes of what had undoubtedly been a very successful and substantive IPU Assembly. She expressed her appreciation for the active engagement of all delegations and called upon delegates and parliaments to actively follow up on the decisions and resolutions they had jointly adopted.

5. 200th Session of the Governing Council

5.1 Membership of the IPU

The Governing Council approved a request for reaffiliation from the Parliament of the Central African Republic and a request for affiliation from the Parliament of Tuvalu. The overall membership of the IPU was thus raised to 173 national parliaments and 11 Associate Members. High-level delegations from the parliaments of Brunei Darussalam, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu also attended as observers with a view to future affiliation.

The Council was apprised of the situation of certain parliaments and endorsed relevant recommendations adopted by the Executive Committee with regard to each of them. It decided to encourage all sides to dialogue in Burundi and reiterated the IPU's offer of its good offices to mediate the crisis, indicating that Geneva would be an ideal venue for talks. Regarding Cambodia, the Council urged the authorities to recognize the value of the political opposition and change-over of political power.

The Council approved the decision to remove the Central African Republic from the list of countries to be closely monitored. It also decided to keep monitoring the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Libya, Thailand and Turkey. The Council expressed the hope that South Sudan would soon return to normalcy. It approved a proposal by the Executive Committee to set up a working group on Syria that could conduct on-site missions and hold meetings outside Assemblies.

The Council condemned the attacks on the St. Petersburg metro on 3 April 2017 and expressed its solidarity with the Russian people. It also deplored the chemical attack in Syria. It endorsed an Executive Committee Statement on the situation in Venezuela and a Presidential Statement on the recent attacks on the Parliament of Paraguay.

5.2 Financial results for 2016

The Governing Council considered the Financial Report and Audited Financial Statements for 2016. The Financial Statements had been prepared in full compliance with the International Public Sector

Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and the accounts of the IPU and the closed Pension Fund were again consolidated into a single set of financial statements.

The financial results for 2016 were introduced by Mr. R. del Picchia (France), Chair of the Sub-Committee on Finance, who reported that the External Auditor had expressed to the Sub-Committee on Finance and in a written report his opinion that the financial statements were of high quality and the collaboration with the IPU finance team had been excellent. Although the IPU had recorded a reduction in its net assets of CHF 296,409, that was fully authorized within the 2016 budget. The performance of IPU investments had achieved a good return and voluntary contributions had increased.

The Internal Auditors' report was presented by Mr. A. Gryffroy (Belgium) on behalf of himself and Ms. S. Moulengui-Mouélé (Gabon). He conveyed their opinion that the accounts accurately portrayed the financial situation of the IPU at 31 December 2016 and complied with all current standards and rules. The External Auditor had expressed no reservations on the Financial Statements and had made no recommendations for improvements. The deficit for the year was within the amount authorized by the Governing Council in the 2016 budget.

The President noted that the IPU had received a clean bill of health from both the External and Internal Auditors and that the Organization's financial management was confirmed to be sound. With no questions from the floor, he commended the Secretary General and his team for the financial results.

5.3 Financial Situation of the IPU

The Governing Council received an overview of the IPU's financial situation at 31 January 2017 and noted that the overall level of expenditure was on track at 99 per cent of the year-to-date budget. Arrears in assessed contributions amounted to CHF 619,000, with 34 Members having overdue accounts. Assessed contributions of CHF 6.3 million had already been paid for 2017, being 62 per cent of the total amount due.

5.4 Cooperation with the United Nations system

The Council took note of the usual checklist of activities conducted in cooperation with the United Nations since the previous Assembly held in October 2016. It noted in particular growing cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on preventing violent extremism as a means of countering terrorism. It took note that all activities carried out in cooperation with the United Nations were part and parcel of the IPU Strategy.

5.5 IPU Strategy for 2017-2021

The Council took note of a report on recent activities in implementation of the Strategy, as well as proposed activities under the new Strategy, in which peace and security – part of the IPU's core and original mandate - featured more prominently. It approved the proposal to establish a Centre for Innovation in Parliament funded by interested Members.

5.6 Recent specialized meetings

The Governing Council took note of the results of the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(a\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(a)-r1.pdf)); the

Regional Seminar on Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through a human rights perspective for Pacific Parliaments ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(b\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(b)-r1.pdf)); the Parliamentary Forum at the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(c\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(c)-r1.pdf)); the Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Parliaments of Latin America and the Caribbean ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(d\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(d)-r1.pdf)); the Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(e\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(e)-r1.pdf)); the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(f\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(f)-r1.pdf)); the South Asian Speakers' Forum on implementation of the SDGs ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(g\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(g)-r1.pdf)); the Regional Seminar for Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia on parliaments and implementation of the SDGs ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(h\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(h)-r1.pdf)); the Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Parliaments of Sub-Saharan Africa ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(i\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(i)-r1.pdf)); and the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women ([http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7\(j\)-r1.pdf](http://www.ipu.org/cnl-e/200/7(j)-r1.pdf)).

5.7 Reports of plenary bodies and specialized committees

The Governing Council took note of the reports on the activities of the Committee on Middle East Questions; the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian; the Gender Partnership Group; the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, which decided to change its name to the Advisory Group on Health; the Forum of Women Parliamentarians; and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU.

The Council also heard the report of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians and approved eight decisions submitted by the latter, noting the reservations expressed by the delegations of Cambodia and Malaysia concerning the cases in their respective countries.

5.8 Future inter-parliamentary meetings

The Council was apprised of an invitation by the Parliament of Argentina to host an IPU Assembly in April 2019. It entrusted the Secretariat with conducting the usual on-site mission to ascertain that all the requirements for holding an Assembly were met. It approved proposals for a number of specialized meetings.

5.9 Amendments to the Statutes and Rules

The Governing Council adopted amendments to the IPU Statutes and Rules, specifically to the revised mandate of the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and the Rules and Practices of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.

The Council agreed that relevant editorial changes would also have to be made in the text of the IPU Statutes. Those would include the change of name of the Advisory Group on Health, as well as changes applicable only in the French version where the feminine form of nouns would precede the masculine form in the interest of gender equality.

5.10 Appointment of a Secretary General for a period of four years

The Governing Council approved the unanimous recommendation by the Executive Committee to appoint the incumbent Secretary General for a second term of office starting on 1 July 2018 and

ending on 30 June 2022. It did so on the basis of the incumbent's satisfactory performance and therefore decided not to initiate the formal procedure for elections. Rather, it invoked Rule 3 of the Secretariat which stipulates that the Executive Committee may propose to the Governing Council that it waive the procedure referred to above and reappoint the incumbent Secretary General.

6. Forum and Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

The meeting of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians brought together 132 delegates from 73 countries and representatives from various international organizations. The President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, Ms. M. Mensah-Williams (Namibia), presided over the meeting.

Participants considered, from a gender perspective, the draft resolution entitled *Promoting enhanced international cooperation on the SDGs, in particular on the financial inclusion of women as a driver of development* (Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade). Two groups were established, with each one considering a different aspect of the resolution. Ms. A. Habibou (Niger) and Ms. P. Locatelli (Italy) were appointed as chairpersons, and Ms. S. Ataullahjan (Canada) and Ms. N. Al Kharoosi (Oman) were appointed as rapporteurs. Participants underscored the need to promote innovative financial services accessible to all women, including in rural areas, and that proper access to those services had to be linked to training, mentoring and financial education programmes.

7. Subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council

7.1 Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

The Committee held seven hearings with delegations and complainants to enhance its understanding of the cases before it and convey its concerns. At this session, the Committee had on its agenda 25 cases concerning the situation of 140 members of parliament in 10 countries. Of the cases examined, 41 per cent involved parliamentarians from Asia with another 41 per cent from Europe, 16 per cent concerned parliamentarians from the Americas, 1 per cent concerned members of parliament from Africa and 1 per cent from the Middle East and North Africa. Twenty-five per cent of the cases concerned women members of parliament. Freedom of expression being a matter of direct or indirect concern in most cases, the violations most frequently considered by the Committee during the session were lack of due process in proceedings against parliamentarians, abusive revocation or suspension of the parliamentary mandate, violation of freedom of assembly and association, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

The Committee submitted eight decisions to the Governing Council for adoption concerning the following countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Philippines and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

7.2 Committee on the Middle East Questions

Members of the Committee examined the current situation and expressed concern about the latest developments in the Middle East. The Committee noted in particular the Knesset's recent adoption of a piece of legislation known as the Regulation Law. The law posed a serious threat to a two-State solution and lasting peace. The Committee praised the IPU President and Secretary General for the IPU Statement that was issued on the Regulation Law and for their efforts to encourage its repeal in the interest of dialogue and peace.

It was recognized that unresolved conflicts in the region were one of the main drivers of violent extremism. Members encouraged the IPU to continue its work on the prevention of violent extremism. The Committee endorsed its work plan for 2017. It recommitted itself to the roundtable approach as a means of building trust and dialogue through cooperation on technical issues, such as water management and renewable water technologies. The Secretary General was tasked with defining the modalities for implementing the planned initiatives. Members also underlined the importance of involving young parliamentarians in the work of the Committee. Members of the Committee pledged to pursue consultations, facilitate dialogue and propose mechanisms for parliamentarians to support sustainable peace in the region. They recognized that it was in moments of tension that dialogue was most needed.

7.3 Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law

Members of the Committee discussed the overall situation of refugees throughout the world and current challenges in ensuring their protection. It recommended that parliaments review current asylum systems in their respective countries with a view to enhancing them. The Committee linked its discussions with the theme of the 136th IPU Assembly on redressing inequality.

The Committee discussed follow-up to its mission to Lebanon, where it had assessed the refugee situation and its impact on the host country. It welcomed the international conference on Syria due to take place in Brussels in April 2017. Members were encouraged to support the call for assistance launched by the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. S. Hariri. The Committee also called on the Lebanese authorities to continue assisting Syrian refugees and protecting their rights and safety.

The Committee reviewed the situation of the more than 10 million stateless people in the world today. It was briefed on recent developments in the UNHCR *#IBelong* campaign and the Global Plan of Action to End Statelessness, including 13 further accessions to the Statelessness Conventions and important reductions in existing stateless populations.

7.4 Gender Partnership Group

The Group monitored women's participation at the 136th IPU Assembly, 31.6 per cent of delegates were women. That was the highest percentage recorded to date. The Group expressed its wish to see that trend continue. Of the 126 delegations present at the Assembly, 114 had at least two delegates. Of those, 12 were all-male (10.5%). They were from the parliaments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Japan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, Monaco, the Philippines and Qatar. There was one all-female delegation (0.9%), from Iceland. The delegations from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Qatar were sanctioned at the Assembly for being exclusively represented by men three times or more consecutively.

The Group discussed the implementation of the IPU gender mainstreaming strategy. It welcomed efforts to better track the participation of women in the debates and panel discussions at IPU Assemblies. It also welcomed work to develop statistics on the participation of delegations by region. That would allow for better follow-up within the geopolitical groups. The Group was informed of the pledges that the IPU Secretary General had made as a Geneva Gender Champion to ensure that 40 per cent of the members of every IPU decision-making body were women.

The Group discussed how to renew commitment to implementing the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, which had been adopted at the 127th IPU. It welcomed the publication of the

IPU self-assessment toolkit, *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments*, and commended those parliaments that had already undertaken assessments using the toolkit.

7.5 Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

The Advisory Group discussed the findings from its field visit on 31 March, during which it had examined the health consequences of child marriage in Bangladesh. It formulated a number of recommendations, which it presented to the Governing Council. The Group was impressed by the progress made to end child marriage in Bangladesh. Over the previous 10 years, the marriage rate for girls under 18 years of age had decreased from 67 per cent to 52 per cent. The Group noted that all stakeholders, ranging from government and parliament to civil society and local authorities, were strongly committed to working together.

The Advisory Group congratulated the Parliament of Bangladesh on the recent adoption of a law to end child marriage. However, it noted with concern that a clause of the law permitted child marriage under "special circumstances". The Group was encouraged to learn that the Bangladesh Government was drafting regulations to avoid that clause being misused. It welcomed that initiative and expressed the hope that strong regulations would be established with the active participation of NGOs and other relevant actors to minimize the scope for abuse of that clause.

The Advisory Group agreed to revise its mandate to bring it in line with the IPU Strategy for 2017-2021. Its main areas of work would be women's, children's and adolescents' health, including HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Advisory Group would also pay attention to how universal health coverage, health security and emerging epidemics related to its core mandate.

The Advisory Group reviewed the 2012 IPU resolution on Access to health as a basic right: The role of parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children. To align the resolution with the IPU Strategy, the SDGs and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, the Group put forward a set of recommendations which would provide further guidance to the parliamentary community on the implementation of the 2012 resolution. The recommendations were submitted to the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights for endorsement.

7.6 Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU

The Forum was attended by 90 young parliamentarians, of whom 42 per cent were women. The average age of participants was 37.9 years. Compared to the previous Assembly held in October 2016, the number of young parliamentarians participating in the Assembly had risen. The percentage of young women attending had improved but the average age had increased. Members were encouraged to include the youngest members of their parliaments in delegations to IPU Assemblies.

Delegates took stock of recent progress achieved and challenges encountered in their respective countries with regard to youth participation. They welcomed the support for the efforts spearheaded by the Forum of Young Parliamentarians to enhance youth participation at the IPU, as such efforts would have ripple effects in national parliaments. They welcomed recent amendments to the Statutes and Rules approved by the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Governing Council and the Assembly to have the President of the Forum serve as an ex-officio member of the Executive

Committee. They further welcomed the proposal to request all delegations to IPU Assemblies to include at least one young female or male member under 45 years of age by 2020.

The young parliamentarians discussed their contributions to the business of the 136th Assembly, focusing on means of securing youth inclusion, not only in education, employment, civic participation and political leadership, but also in community life, sports and arts. Persistent inequalities in basic rights, such as the right to education and to health, were priorities to be addressed.

They further discussed future IPU meetings for young parliamentarians: a regional meeting of young parliamentarians of the Asia-Pacific region to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 25 and 26 April 2017; a regional meeting of young parliamentarians in Africa to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, in July 2017; and the Fourth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians to be held in Ottawa, Canada, in November 2017. Participants stressed that the future draft resolution to be debated at the 137th Assembly, *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*, had to be strong on youth participation.

8. Joint Meeting of Chairpersons of Geopolitical Groups and Presidents of the Standing Committees.

The IPU President and Secretary General met with the Chairpersons of the Geopolitical Groups and the Presidents of the Standing Committees to discuss the question of representation and participation in the IPU, preparations for the International Day of Democracy, as well as modalities to strengthen reporting by Members on follow-up of IPU resolutions and decisions.

The IPU President and Secretary General referred to the decision of the IPU governing bodies to increase the representation of women on the IPU Executive Committee to one third of the elected members. The modalities for implementation of that decision, as proposed by the Gender Partnership Group, had been approved by the Executive Committee. The Chairpersons of the Geopolitical Groups expressed their full support for implementing the decision and ensuring gender equality in the work of the IPU. All geopolitical groups were keen for more young MPs to participate in national delegations and in debates at IPU Assemblies. The Groups would discuss practical modalities to enhance youth participation, with a view to preparing concrete recommendations for adoption at the 137th Assembly.

The Secretary General provided an overview of planned activities, including a campaign to endorse a democracy pledge, background materials and brochures for use by and in parliaments, events in Geneva and New York, the adoption of a resolution at the 137th Assembly, and a specific communications strategy. He encouraged all geopolitical groups and Members to engage in that event, noting that the role and responsibilities of parliaments in safeguarding and promoting the core principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law were more important now than ever before with democracy under attack in so many places in the world. The Chairpersons of the Geopolitical Groups undertook to raise awareness among their respective members.

The Director of the Division for Member Parliaments and External Relations at the IPU recalled the various modalities used over the years to ensure the statutory reporting on follow-up of IPU resolutions and other decisions. She invited the Chairpersons of the Geopolitical Groups and the Presidents of the Standing Committees to consider new modalities under which all Members would be required to submit reports every few years and not annually, as had been the case previously. Measures would also be taken to ensure greater visibility for national reports in the IPU governing

bodies. While modalities were being formulated, the Groups would be invited to help identify a limited number of “volunteers” to prepare the 2017 reports. The Chairpersons welcomed that new approach. They underscored the importance of improving the reporting exercise, of providing additional time and of increasing predictability to enable Members to plan well in advance. They would discuss the matter in their respective Groups, gather any suggestions and forward their recommendations to the IPU Secretariat.

The President expressed the wish to further strengthen cooperation and interaction between the IPU and the geopolitical groups, to go well beyond the regular programme of work during IPU Assemblies. The Groups could play a much more prominent role, for example, in enhancing interaction between UN country teams and national parliaments, and in bringing good practices to the attention of the broader IPU membership. As the IPU was playing an increasingly prominent role in fostering political dialogue between political factions within countries, the geopolitical groups could also assist in early warning and in obtaining relevant information. All participants recognized the value of the joint meetings and expressed their interest in strengthening cooperation.

9. Interactive debate on Parliamentarians and social networks: Making effective use of social media

The debate was moderated by Mr. P. Martin-Lalande (France) and allowed parliamentarians from 15 countries to share their experiences and lessons learned. Numerous advantages were cited, including the possibility of direct access to large numbers of people. For many young people, social media was their main or only channel of information, so that parliamentarians had no choice but to use such means to reach them. Parliamentarians could use social media to show the reality of their daily work, demonstrate that they were “normal” people, and so break down the barriers that might exist between citizens and their representatives.

Parliamentarians were of the opinion that to be successful, however, it was necessary to be fully convinced and a “true believer” in the need both to interact constantly with citizens and to be ready to respond to their questions and challenges. That required very good judgment, as parliamentarians’ rapid reactions to new events would be available online forever. While dealing with criticism was a normal part of a politician’s life, parliamentarians must insist that it was not acceptable to be vulgar or inappropriate online. Investment was required in the skills needed to identify fake news or fake profiles online. Parliamentarians must be attentive to protecting their privacy. Those points held true for public figures, but more generally for all users of social media and online communication tools.

Parliamentarians described how the information they gathered and their interactions on social media made a direct contribution to their work in parliament. A member from Italy shared an experience from within his political party of a form of direct democracy that allowed registered users of an online platform to propose and vote on subjects for new laws. The party would then develop the most popular proposals into draft legislation and table them in parliament. He proposed that future debates in the “Parliaments in the digital era” series could further examine the online tools that supported direct democracy.

10. Site event on Breaking down barriers for improved health of young generations: A multisectoral approach

The panelists were Mr. I. Askew (Director of the Department of Reproductive Health and Research, WHO), Ms. G. Verburg (SUN Movement), Ms. N. Luo (Zambia) and Mr. F. Ndugulile (United Republic of Tanzania) Mr. Askew highlighted the importance of governance for a multisectoral response targeting the health and well-being of adolescents. Clear and strong linkages should be made at the local level and the sustainability of resources should be ensured.

There were a number of challenges to the effective implementation of multisectoral policies. Roles, responsibilities and agendas should be clearly defined and understood. He called for the establishment of specialized committees and implementation teams in ministries and parliament, without recommending any single model.

Ms. G. Verburg explained the objectives of the SUN Movement and outlined the importance of nutrition for adolescent mothers and their babies, in particular in the first 1,000 days of the infant's life. She invited parliamentarians to exercise fully their oversight role in holding governments and prime ministers accountable and drew attention to Côte d'Ivoire, where substantial investment in nutrition attested to the strong political commitment towards ending malnutrition.

Ms. N. Luo highlighted the collective efforts of the National Assembly of Zambia to fight child marriage. Legislation was not sufficient. Parliamentarians had to rely on their representative function to increase efforts at the community level, act as role models and fight the persistence of such harmful practices. She explained how relevant ministries coordinated action at the community level to ensure that interventions reached those adolescents most in need.

Mr. F. Ndugulile said that the National Assembly of Tanzania had been partnering with civil society organizations to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents. Parliamentarians had a duty to translate the concerns of adolescents into legislation, in particular to prevent harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence. While sex education in school was a key driver of change, sexual and reproductive health issues remained taboo, and national programmes could be undermined by the influence held by traditional and religious leaders at the community level.

The panel was followed by a lively and interactive debate in which nine MPs intervened, seven of whom were women. A number of suggestions were made and parliamentarians outlined some of the efforts being made in their countries, including the distribution of dedicated books to encourage a dialogue on sexual and reproductive health issues between children and parents, nutrition programmes, campaigns to raise awareness of inappropriate feeding habits and the involvement of traditional and religious leaders in national health and nutrition campaigns. Challenges included difficulties faced by parliamentarians in working with NGOs, lack of awareness of the link between child marriage and gender-based violence, and a limited focus on fighting harmful behaviors among adolescents. If sexual and reproductive health policies were to be effective, parliaments had to raise issues at the government level and coordinate implementation efforts at the community level.

11. Field visit by the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

Members of the IPU Advisory Group participated in a field visit to a public hospital and in meetings with representatives of civil society and international organizations, members of parliament, and government representatives.

Members learned that, notwithstanding the remarkable results achieved with respect to poverty alleviation and access to health services, continuous commitment from the government and parliament was required to accelerate progress and change harmful habits. Members of the Advisory Group met with managers and staff to discuss the care given to pregnant girls and victims of child marriage. Members learned that not only medical care but also psychological support was provided for cases of early pregnancy or violence against girls. They also learned that counselling centres established through partnerships between government and NGOs were located around the country. Members suggested that sex education should be taught in schools and that efforts should be stepped up to promote nationwide campaigns encouraging adolescents to use contraceptives and decrease the rate of early pregnancy.

Members learned that participants recognized the value of most of the clauses included in the recently-approved legislation on child marriage, as well as the efforts of government and parliament to curb the rates of child marriage. However, concern was expressed about a clause that allowed for child marriage in special circumstances. Members learned that child brides were often abandoned, which usually meant that they had to resort to prostitution in order to survive. They also learned that the lack of sex education was a major cause of the HIV-epidemic. That link had been confirmed by the example of two adolescents who had offered to share their personal experience with the Group.

Members of the Advisory Group also met with four members of the Bangladesh Parliament and discussed the provisions of the recently-approved law on child marriage. The MPs stated that the new law would serve to maintain momentum in the fight against child marriage in Bangladesh, and that the controversial clause would not be misused or hinder progress. Regarding the capacity of the Bangladesh Parliament to hold the government to account, the MPs affirmed that all political parties had committed to end child marriage in Bangladesh and were therefore playing a vital role in raising awareness among local communities of the need to end that harmful practice.

12. Joint IPU-UNICEF field visit on child rights issues

About 40 MPs and parliamentary staff participated in a field visit jointly organized by the IPU and UNICEF. They visited centres dealing with adolescent development and participation (ADP clubs) and early childhood development located in Baunia Badh, Mirpur, in Dhaka.

The ADP clubs were designed to facilitate children's entry into adulthood. They provided a venue for adolescent girls and boys to learn about their rights, and to meet and discuss issues that mattered to them, such as child marriage, human rights, dowry, birth registration, transmission of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and drug abuse. The early childhood development centres provided developmentally and age-appropriate learning through playgroups, childcare and pre-primary education for the most disadvantaged. The centres developed the children's linguistic, social and cognitive skills through singing, and question-and-answer sessions.

Parliamentarians then had discussions with workers at the centres and learned about how the centres worked. They learned that the ADP clubs made adolescents aware of their basic rights. They

were told that the teenagers passed on their knowledge to family members, friends and neighbours who did not have the opportunity to attend such clubs.

Parliamentarians formulated recommendations on how parliament could contribute to efforts to further promote the rights of the child in line with action to tackle socioeconomic inequalities. The recommendations included calling on parliamentarians to make further efforts to break down inequalities and offer equal opportunities for boys and girls; and taking wide-ranging action to improve significantly the well-being of children. The rights of the child should be a priority for parliamentary action.

13. Roundtable on Parliamentary action plan for nuclear-risk reduction and achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world

Mr. A. Ware, PNND Global Coordinator, introduced the topic by providing an update on the nuclear weapons situation and threat, and the key diplomatic and multilateral processes to address that threat and advance nuclear disarmament. He referred to a briefing paper on Nuclear risk-reduction, disarmament and the role of parliamentarians, which highlighted three multilateral processes: the UN negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons, which had commenced in March 2017; the review cycle for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that would resume in May 2017; and the UN High-Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, due to take place in 2018. Mr. Ware also noted the connection between cutting nuclear weapons budgets, divesting public funds from nuclear weapons corporations, and financing the SDGs.

Ms. L. Rojas (Mexico) provided additional background on the UN negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. She expressed the hope that such a treaty would be completed and ready for ratification by the time of the UN High-Level Conference. Delegates raised a number of issues in the discussion, including whether verification of disarmament and non-proliferation agreements could provide guarantees that such agreements would not be violated. Another issue was how to encourage countries that relied on nuclear weapons for their security to rely instead on international law, cooperative security mechanisms such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and/or conventional deterrence.

14. Recommendations

Article 7 of the Union's Statutes of the IPU states that *"It is the duty of Members of the Union, to submit the resolutions of the Union within their respective Parliaments, in the most appropriate form; to communicate them to the Government; to stimulate their implementation and inform the Secretariat of the Union, as often as possible, particularly in the annual reports, as to the steps taken and the results obtained"*

It is against this background that, the IPU National Group (Namibia) recommends that the Parliament of Namibia discussed and support the report and inform the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the following:

- Action taken and/or that will be taken in Parliament to follow up on the recommendations contained in the resolutions;
- Plenary or Committee debates on the resolutions in Parliament;

- Some indication that recommendations contained in the resolutions have been considered or influenced and / or will be considered in the Parliament's legislative work and programme;
- Information on any legislative or other measures that have been adopted or will be adopted by Parliament or by any of its committees which conform to the recommendations in the resolutions.

Signatures:

Hon. M N Mensah- Williams

Chairperson of the National Council

Hon. Phillip Haitange Shikongo

IPU Member

Hon. Michael Shipandeni Shikongo

IPU Member