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+41 22 919 41 50
+41 22 919 41 60
postbox@ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

IPU Statement

Mr. Martin Chungong
IPU Secretary General

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The Inter-Parliamentary Union, representing 179 national parliaments and more than 46,000 parliamentarians worldwide, has enjoyed and continues to enjoy a long-standing collaboration with the World Health Organization. In October 2019, that collaboration resulted in the adoption of the first-ever global parliamentary resolution on universal health coverage. This landmark resolution calls on parliaments to ensure global health security by strengthening surveillance and response systems as well as advocating for and allocating appropriate resources for the implementation of the International Health Regulations.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the world could have been better prepared. It has brought into sharper focus the need for that IPU resolution and for parliaments to be more robust in supporting global health security. Measures put in place by countries to contain the spread of the coronavirus are having a profound impact on the lives of citizens, the economy and society as a whole. These measures require more – not less – parliamentary scrutiny. In times of crisis such as the current one, parliaments are duty-bound to ensure that all measures taken result in enhanced protection and support of the most vulnerable.

The IPU has therefore been very keen to ensure that parliaments are at the heart of the national and global response to COVID-19.

Our campaign “Parliaments in a time of pandemic” is mobilizing parliaments in the global response to COVID-19 and drawing lessons for future parliamentary responses. As part of this campaign we have mobilized parliaments to contribute to the WHO COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund. We are pleased that parliaments are responding generously to this appeal by contributing institutionally and individually.

Our collaboration with WHO now fully encompasses global health security. We were pleased to work in partnership with UNDRR to institute a series of webinars for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on COVID-19. The first such webinar brought together over 500 participants. It is essential that we keep alive this important conversation between the scientific community and policymakers.

The time for action is now. We welcome wholeheartedly the whole-of-government approach to efforts intended to address COVID-19. That includes parliaments. We must also learn from this pandemic to build back better. Parliaments must take steps to ensure our health systems are well resourced and resilient to withstand future emergencies, and that international frameworks to enhance preparedness and reduce the vulnerabilities of our communities, such as the International Health Regulations, are fully funded and implemented at the national level.

The IPU looks forward to strengthening its partnership with WHO as we learn from COVID-19 to provide parliaments with the knowledge and technical support they need to strengthen emergency preparedness and response.

At the end of the day, parliaments are about defending the people and saving lives. Contributing robustly to efforts to contain this pandemic is a golden opportunity to prove the relevance of parliaments – parliaments that are more responsive to the needs of the citizens they serve.