



PRESS RELEASE

SOCIAL PROTECTION NEEDED TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS

Parliament of Namibia, Inter Parliamentary Union and UNICEF host regional parliamentary meeting to champion child-sensitive policies

20 October, Windhoek,- In an effort to forge greater commitment for child-sensitive social protection policies, parliamentarians from countries in East and Southern Africa have gathered for a three day meeting in Windhoek, Namibia. Hosted by the Parliament of Namibia in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNICEF, the forum aims to build consensus amongst parliamentarians for efforts to broaden safety nets for the most vulnerable, especially children affected by HIV and AIDS. The meeting will stress the particular role parliamentarians can play in scaling up social protection schemes by shaping laws, approving budgets and holding governments accountable.

In a region where more than half the population survives on less than \$1.25 per day, an estimated 9.7 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS, and millions more have experienced deepening poverty, lost education and discrimination due to the impact of the HIV pandemic. Social protection schemes, however, have been enacted in several areas and are already having an impact in keeping children in school, better nourished and protected from abuse.

“We appreciate that the fallout of the financial crisis has put enormous pressures on government spending and the public purse. Yet the proof is clear -child sensitive social protection schemes such as cash transfers, removal of user fees for health and education for the poorest, along with pro-poor policies, laws, and regulations, can help children cope with the worst impact of extreme poverty. They can also bring social stability and more equity to society as a whole,” said Elhadj As Sy, UNICEF’s Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa.

In recent years, many African Governments have signed on to the value of using social protection schemes to tackle extreme poverty and vulnerability. The Livingstone Accord, signed by 13 governments in 2006 under the auspices of the African Union, agreed that social protection strategies be integrated into national development plans and budgets. This was followed by the Social Policy Framework for Africa, developed in Windhoek in 2008 which signaled increased support by the African Union. The Southern African Development Community also recently finalized its strategic framework for orphans and vulnerable children and youth, offering a further roadmap for providing basic services to these often excluded groups.

These declarations represent an emerging consensus that a minimum package of essential social protection should cover health care and benefits for children, informal workers, the unemployed, the elderly and persons with disabilities, to be expanded as more fiscal space becomes available.

“Parliamentarians play a decisive role in garnering political support within countries to prioritize and commit to policies to target marginalized children and those hit hardest by HIV and AIDS,” said IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who is also Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia.. “This meeting provides a valuable opportunity to learn from each other’s experience and build on the evidence that social protection can help mitigate the worst consequences of HIV and AIDs.”

Members of parliament will be able to share lessons learned, discuss the latest evidence from the region and become more familiar with ways in which they can respond to the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

“We know from our experiences here in Namibia that for national social protection schemes to work they need to be owned and led not only by the Government but by Parliament as well. They need to be seen as an investment from the national treasury that contributes to a fairer, more just and caring society. It is parliamentarians who can foster dialogue among their constituents to create the political will for these types of policies. It is parliamentarians who can ensure the national budget reflects these priorities” added the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament.

Social protection schemes have been identified as ways not only to care for those affected by HIV and AIDS but also play a critical role in preventing new infections. Successful schemes in the region include the ones in Namibia, where nationwide pensions for children and the elderly have provided a safety net; the South African Universal Child Grant, the largest cash transfer scheme on the continent; the Malawi cash transfer scheme, which targets the poorest ten percent of labor-constrained families and which the Government has recently agreed to take to scale; and the Kenyan Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable children that reaches 90,000 households.

Note to the editors:

Parliamentarians attending this event are from Angola, Burundi, DRC, Lesotho, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda , Zambia and Zimbabwe.

About IPU

Established in 1889 and with Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU – the oldest multilateral political organization in the world – currently brings together 155 parliaments and eight associated regional assemblies. The world organization of parliaments also has an office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations. IPU website: www.ipu.org

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

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