



PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

Copenhagen, 16 December 2009

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Danish Folketing



Summary Report

The IPU and the Danish Parliament jointly organized a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The meeting brought together several hundred members of parliament from over 60 countries to discuss what the post-Copenhagen agenda should look like and how parliaments can contribute to its implementation. The debate identified a broad agenda for parliamentary action beyond COP15. Significantly, the scientific findings relating to climate change were not questioned by the parliamentarians. Rather, they voiced their unequivocal support for ambitious action to address climate change.

Opening session

Speakers

- Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, IPU President
- Mr. Thor Pedersen, President of the Folketing
- Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Republic of Maldives

Summary

Dr. T-B. Gurirab (IPU President) opened the meeting by welcoming the several hundred members of parliament present in the room. Dr. Gurirab said that the meeting was a clear indication of the determination of parliaments to address the climate change challenge and the IPU's desire to help parliaments do so.

Mr. T. Pedersen (President of the Folketing) said that democracy in Denmark had begun in 1849 based on principles of human rights and freedom. He hoped, therefore, that his parliament's participation would enhance democracy as its aim was "more welfare for more people". The growth of the world's population represented a global challenge that posed a threat to the climate. He wanted the topic of family planning to be included in the debate. The growth of the world's population would result in greater pressure on resources, as more people would demand more food and more energy resources. He was concerned at how development goals could be reached without compromising the environment. Another challenge was the threat to the rain forests. He hoped that the conference would be fruitful.

Mr. M. Nasheed (President of the Republic of Maldives) said that in 1999, when he was an MP, he was removed from parliament and sent to jail because he believed in the rule of law and good governance. However, at the time some friends had stood by his side, among them the IPU. They had helped him and as a result, he was not held as a political prisoner. Now the Maldives had a new Constitution and a new elected parliament, but the country still experienced problems. Without good governance, the Maldives and other countries would not

be able to deal with climate change. He cited the example of the former authoritarian governments of the Maldives, which had adapted to climate change to some extent but because government posts had been awarded without transparency and without consultation, those governments had failed.

Finance was key to adaptation to support environmental protection, and technology had an important role to play, but without good governance, plans to protect the environment would be compromised. Parliamentarians had a crucial role to play in those efforts.

No part of his country was more than 2m above sea level. Sometimes it was easy to believe that climate change was like any other international issue, but the truth was that it was not possible to "negotiate with the law of physics".

The issue of climate change did not concern only developed countries but was also of relevance to developing countries. Even if all the developed countries stopped production immediately, at the end of the century the world would still experience a temperature rise. Finding solutions to the problem of climate change required the attention of all countries.

For the people of the Maldives, climate change was not an abstract threat. It was a clear threat to their survival. Climate change could not be reduced to a political deal.

The Maldives intended to become 100 per cent carbon neutral, which was not just about doing the right thing but also an economic choice, one that was necessary for development.

Mr. Nasheed reiterated his belief that good governance was necessary for the success of any action on climate change. He reminded delegates that policies and practices dealing with climate change needed to be transparent and accountable and the result of consultative processes with the population. Green investors had embraced his country's ambition of developing a green economy and many of those investments had come as pleasant surprises. They had created a cycle of positive change in his country and there was a need to do that on a global scale. Parliamentarians should not fall into the trap of thinking that their heads of State would take action on climate change. Although the issue of climate change had been often seen as an issue of money and aid, in fact it had to do with much more than money. It had to do with bequeathing a future to posterity.

Interactive panel discussion: The politics of climate legislation

Panellists

- Mr. John Prescott, MP (UK), PACE Rapporteur on Climate Change, former Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
- Mr. Denis Minev, State Secretary, Amazonas State (Brazil)
- Mr. James Bacchus, former Member of the US Congress and former Chairperson of the WTO Appellate Body
- Ms. Loren Legarda, Senator (Philippines)

Summary

Mr. J. Prescott (United Kingdom) opened the session by saying that he felt the same as he had 12 years ago in Kyoto, where there had been an atmosphere of anxiety. It was vital to keep the Kyoto agreement on the table during the meeting. The negotiation process would be

exhausting, as was expected during international negotiations. Although there seemed to be consensus on the need for an adaptation fund, that was not a simple decision. Still, he felt that consensus could be reached. Failure was not an option. He expressed his concern over the statement by the leader of the US delegation that an agreement required only that the meeting do the maths and was not about politics. He disagreed with that comment because he felt that any agreement reached would have to deal with the notion of equity.

The world was calling on the European Union (EU), China and the United States to make a deal at the summit. He expressed the hope that the Copenhagen agreement would show that the world had the courage to solve the problem of climate change.

Mr. D. Minev (Brazil) emphasized the importance of the climate change deal for his state in Brazil. He shared with the meeting changes that had been introduced in his country concerning protection of the environment, and said that his state considered itself to be a key player in environmental issues in Brazil. He discussed the Juma Sustainable Development Reserve, which was the first Brazilian project involving the Reduction of Emissions of Green House Effect Gases from Deforestation (RED). By the end of its first period of certification, in 2016, the project was expected to avert the emission of at least 3,611,723 tonnes of CO₂. The project would end its activities in 2050, when it was likely to have generated credits of 189,767,027 tonnes of CO₂.

Mr. J. Bacchus (USA) said that he was the first American to arrive in Copenhagen and quote a French philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville. He explained the “Principle of Self-Interest Rightly Understood”, which, for Tocqueville, represented the main difficulty in a democracy. He felt that the major demand of that principle was that citizens needed to first see the broad picture, and second be able to see the long-term consequences. That had been the main challenge of democracies and was also the main challenge at the conference. The difficulty with fulfilling the principle started with the natural tendency of politicians to avoid examining the broader picture with the aim of being re-elected. There was a need, however, to absorb both aspects of that principle.

The issue of climate change was a prominent example of that challenge. He shared the views of the President of the Maldives and of his long-time friend, Al Gore. Based on his experience with trade, he pointed out that that the best thing that delegates could do was conclude a global agreement. If that did not happen, countries would go back to national legislation that was not bound by any international framework, which made respecting international requirements at the national level more difficult. He supported the view of WTO Director-General, Pascal Lamy, that countries should not use trade as an excuse for not reaching a deal on climate change. If the meeting failed to conclude a global agreement, national interests would dominate, and that would not necessarily correspond to global needs.

Senator L. Legarda (Philippines) said that in the Philippines, the problem of climate change was not a problem of the future but was already leading to a growing number of natural disasters. The country currently experienced at least 20 typhoons a year. There was a need for an agreement in Copenhagen in spite of limited resources. The Government of the Philippines had been enacting environmental legislation to deal with disasters related to climate change. For centuries, gross domestic product (GDP) and other economic statistics had been the standard measures used to evaluate countries, but that she believed that the status of a country should be based on good governance. She argued that a new brand of politics was needed, which placed people at the centre.

Rural livelihoods should be promoted and protected to avoid rapid and unplanned urbanization. She also stressed the need to be cautious with regard to investments. In times of crisis, a debt reclaim system should be considered for developing countries. On behalf of the vulnerable millions in the Philippines who lived on less than a dollar a day, she said that the politics of climate change was interconnected with the politics of poverty, and the need to support the fight against corruption. She advocated a new brand of politics, in which governments promoted cooperation and collaboration and adopted a national development agenda to which parliamentarians brought their capacities, but also the vulnerabilities of their constituencies. She urged parliamentarians to go beyond the talk and make sure that their actions were independent of the size of their countries because the effects of climate change would be felt by all.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

Several questions were addressed to Mr. Bacchus, as parliamentarians took advantage of the presence of a former member of the US House of Representatives to ascertain what could be expected from the USA regarding the negotiations in the following days.

There were requests for access to the environmental legislation that had been approved in the Philippines, and Ms. Legarda made available to the IPU a copy of the Philippines Climate Change Act for other countries to use as a model.

Some parliamentarians raised the problem of implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, with some arguing that there had not been sufficient time for implementation. They claimed that the issue was not just about money, but about the determination of governments to implement the Protocol.

Others drew an analogy between the Doha agreement and any agreements arising from the Copenhagen conference, with some MPs expressing their doubts about the use of that analogy to support reaching an agreement.

Briefing session: Progress report on COP15 negotiations

Mr. T.L. Poulsen, Danish Minister for the Environment, was invited to report on the negotiation progress. He reminded delegates that they had only two days to reach an agreement, and he felt that that was one of the key moments in history where the meeting could not afford to miss the deadline. At the moment, there were still unresolved issues on the table. The deadlock in negotiations was a political one, and not related to technology and finance. He underscored the importance of having so many world leaders at the summit. One of the difficulties was achieving consensus on the financial aspects of an agreement. The European Union had led the way on that question. He appealed to parliamentarians to follow up at the national level what would be agreed on in Copenhagen.

Interactive panel discussion: Sharing responsibility for the future: parliamentary oversight of government action on climate change

Composition of the panel

Moderator

- Mr. Patrice Martin-Lalande, MP (France), President of the IPU Second Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Panellists

- Ms. Jeanette Fitzsimons, MP (New Zealand)
- Mr. Eyvind Vesselbo, MP (Denmark)
- Mr. Saber Chowdhury, MP (Bangladesh)
- Ms. Makhotso Magdeline Soty, MP (South Africa)

Summary

Ms. J. Fitzsimons (New Zealand) said that climate change was symptomatic of human action against nature, which was not able to fight back. As mistakes had already been made, the world needed to agree that all resources would be shared.

Parliamentarians were prisoners of an economic mindset. She called on parliamentarians to propose policies and challenge governments on environmental protection. Her country had legislation on energy efficiency and some of that environmental legislation had started off as members' bills, which revealed the legislative power that individual MPs could hold. Until recently, the New Zealand Parliament had not had any say in international treaties, but a committee had been set up to report to the House on the implications of treaties. While it did not have the power to change agreements, that committee could at least ensure the scrutiny of treaties signed by the government and in that way, support transparency.

Mr. E. Vesselbo (Denmark) said that the negotiation process was not just about Denmark reducing emissions, but about all countries committing to reductions. He was, however, both sceptical and cautious about what could be expected of the Copenhagen negotiations.

Mr. S. Chowdhury (Bangladesh) reminded the meeting that the participation of MPs in COP 15 was limited to being part of a government delegation, and that situation left them in "no man's land".

He was pleased to see that the IPU had organized a meeting dedicated to parliamentarians as part of the COP 15 event and expressed his gratitude to the IPU for that initiative. He defended the notion that parliamentarians should not be limited in their actions after COP15. One of the lessons to be learned from the Kyoto negotiations was that it had been a top-down process. He suggested that the IPU should create a structure similar to the one that existed with regard to the WTO, where parliamentarians came together in parallel with WTO meetings.

Regarding climate change, Mr. Chowdhury reminded the parliamentarians that their oversight function would be vital as only parliaments had the power to hold governments to account. Financial management would also be crucial, since there would be millions of dollars involved. It would be important to create a code of ethics to govern activities related to climate change. He suggested that such a code could be drawn up by the IPU and in that way, climate change could be an opportunity for the IPU.

Parliamentarians could ensure the continuity of policies dealing with climate change by facilitating cross-party consensus to prevent a change of government leading to a change of policies on crucial climate change issues.

Ms. M.M. Soty (South Africa) underscored the need for unity on the African continent on climate changes issues and urged negotiators at the Bella Centre to come to an agreement.

A lively debate followed, during which the parliamentarians requested the IPU to lead the negotiations with the United Nations on climate change matters. Some suggested that, at the IPU Assembly in March, there should be a discussion on climate issues and on the role of the IPU and parliamentarians. There was a suggestion for the IPU to organize a meeting to follow up on the climate change meeting at the next IPU Assembly to guarantee continuity. Several parliamentarians requested the IPU to follow preparations for COP16 and push for the involvement of parliamentarians.

Participants felt strongly that the IPU should be proactive and play a key role in the climate change agenda. The meeting believed that parliamentarians could be agents of change and that the IPU could take the lead on behalf of the parliamentarians of the world in that matter.

There was also a call for more debate among political parties on the subject of climate change since parliamentarians were also members of political parties. There was a suggestion to create a network of parliamentarians concerned with climate change issues within the IPU. There was also a request for the IPU to build capacity within national parliamentary committees dealing with climate change.

Closing session

Mr. S. Gade (Rapporteur of the closing session, Danish MP and President of GLOBE Europe) said that there was enormous goodwill to do more than what was on the table at the Bella Centre. He also remarked that there were no disagreements on the scientific validity of climate concerns and alerts, and there was an understanding that there was a link between climate change, food security, and development. There had been a unanimous appeal for an agreement, and consensus that more needed to be done by the USA and Europe, but also by the developing countries, whose economies were growing very fast. His conclusion was that there was support for the agreement and follow-up. The meeting had called for transparency of conduct among parliamentarians vis-à-vis climate change and a need to share best practices, examples, and knowledge after COP 15. The IPU had a key role to play in allowing the voices of parliamentarians to be heard at the global level. It was felt that the IPU could convey to COP15 the need to involve parliamentarians. The participants agreed that the next COP meeting in Mexico could be an opportunity to involve parliaments.

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Proposals for follow-up action

During the debate, delegates put forward a number of proposals concerning possible follow-up action to be taken by the IPU on the issue of climate change as follows:

1. Establish a group of experts entrusted with setting an agenda for parliamentary action on climate change in a broader context of global challenges relating to food security, poverty eradication, international trade, etc.;
2. Produce reference tools and compile models of framework legislation pertaining to renewable energies, carbon emissions and climate change;
3. Draw up recommendations on the protection of vulnerable groups in the context of response measures to combat climate change;

4. Compile a list of basic elements for possible inclusion in national climate change acts and similar instruments;
5. Draw up methodological recommendations on ways to assess the climate impact of bills, including carbon-footprint analysis of government-sponsored bills;
6. Draw up recommendations for parliaments on best practices in terms of climate-sensitive budgeting;
7. Advocate regular reporting by the government to the parliament on the implementation of national strategies to combat climate change;
8. Draw up a check-list of indicators to help governments harmonize reporting on climate change action;
9. Encourage parliaments to promote a review national school curricula to incorporate a climate change component;
10. Create an interactive web-based platform for systematization and dissemination of information on climate-related action by national parliaments, including follow-up of COP15;
11. Provide targeted capacity-building and technical assistance to parliaments of developing countries to help tackle climate change issues;
12. Assess the relative importance of consumption patterns and population growth as factors contributing to climate change;
13. Draw up a model code of ethics to help parliaments exercise effectively their oversight of government spending of climate-related funds;
14. Call on the IPU to assume its role as a parliamentary counterpart of the UNFCCC and a facilitator of parliamentary involvement in the process;
15. Propose the holding of a parliamentary COP15 follow-up meeting within the framework of the 122nd IPU Assembly in Bangkok;
16. Draw up proposals to stimulate more active participation of MPs in international negotiations on climate change;
17. Encourage the IPU to participate in the campaign to raise political awareness of the challenges presented by global warming and climate change;
18. Set up an ad hoc body within the IPU to deal specifically with parliamentary action on climate change;
19. Urge the IPU to continue to marshal political support for upholding the principles of good governance, democratic accountability and transparency in the context of international efforts to combat climate change.