



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

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



SPEECH BY THE IPU PRESIDENT, DR. THEO-BEN GURIRAB, AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE MEETING

Distinguished President of the Folketing,
His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Maldives,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first and foremost say a warm word of thanks to our gracious Danish hosts for receiving us so warmly in Copenhagen. We feel privileged to be meeting here in the august setting of the Danish Parliament.

I wish to extend a particular word of welcome to the President of the Republic of Maldives, Mr. Nasheed, who is honouring us with his presence here today. I can think of no better person to help instill a proper sense of reality and urgency into today's deliberations. He knows only too well the disastrous effects of climate change on low-lying small island States. I am sure he will tell us that the time for procrastination on climate change has long since passed.

The effects of global warming have been documented and analyzed by scientists. More droughts and flooding, less ice and snow, more extreme weather events, desertification, rising sea levels, climate-induced migration - all of them appear on the climate change menu and are likely to strike from one day to the next unless we take urgent action. The exact extent of the challenge may be difficult to predict but, politically, it is clear that we need to take action.

The UN Secretary-General recently called climate change the "defining challenge of our time". We wish to signal the determination of parliaments to address this challenge and we want the IPU to lead this effort.

We have a full and intense program today. Our discussions will of course be linked to the negotiations taking place at the Bella Centre, but we should also be looking beyond COP15. We want to see commitments that are politically, operationally and legally binding. These last few days have demonstrated that efforts to forge an ambitious, effective and fair deal do not stop in Copenhagen.

So, what should the post-Copenhagen agenda look like and how can parliaments contribute to its implementation? Should we, as legislators, initiate the adoption of mandatory national timeframes already at this stage? Should we strive to apply the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities also on sub-national level? Can we speed up the "greening" of our economies and lay the foundation for low-carbon eco-efficient growth?

We know that action to combat climate change will come at a cost. It will involve public funding, private investments, carbon markets, and so on and so on. Can we simply leave the setting of policy to our governments? I think not. We need to make sure that the necessary political will is there to raise and allocate much needed financial resources.

Even so, let us be clear: parliaments and the executive branch have very different responsibilities when it comes to international negotiations, including on the subject of climate change.

Governments negotiate rules and arrangements on behalf of States. Parliaments scrutinize government action, influence policies pursued in intergovernmental negotiations, ratify international agreements, and implement them through appropriate legislation and budget allocations.

That is why much of our discussion today will focus on the efficiency of parliamentary oversight of government action to enact environmentally-driven economic growth and build climate-resilient societies.

Clearly our countries and economies are very different and we are not equally responsible for having created the situation in which we now find ourselves. That said, I believe we share a common interest to address climate change not only through transformation of the world economies and of the ways in which we use energy resources, but also of how we develop the necessary legislative framework on which these actions must be based. We must all contribute to that end.

All countries will want to be part of and benefit from innovation; Innovation of technologies, innovation of the regulatory framework, innovation of financial mechanisms and decision-making. Most of these arrangements have far-reaching consequences. They need to be well understood by all and prepared for. They require political will and legislative guidelines far beyond the climate regime itself.

I hope that our meeting will help identify a positive agenda for climate-related action by the IPU as well. The Climate Change Convention has been ratified by 192 countries and has garnered near-universal support. Its legitimacy must be a source of encouragement. We hope that the same can be achieved for the future climate change agreement. Time is of the essence.

The several hundred members of parliament present in this room today and the tens of thousands of delegates who seek access to the Bella Centre can be perceived as a challenge; how to fit you in and give you all an equal opportunity to participate. I prefer, however, to view this as an extraordinary opportunity. Your presence in Copenhagen provides eloquent testimony of a global awareness and commitment to address together the most pressing challenge of our times. We should build on that.

I am encouraged by the Danish Minister who is responsible for the Bella Centre UN Conference, who said: "We have no alternative. We must handle climate change and we must do it right now. Copenhagen is the deadline. The time is up. Let's get the job done."

To that end, I hope that our session today will be crowned with success and look forward to a rich and constructive debate, in the true parliamentary tradition.

I thank you.