

144th IPU Assembly - General Debate
Statement by the Head of the Austrian Delegation Mr Reinhold Lopatka, MP
Nusa Dua, Indonesia, 22 March 2022

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Honourable Speakers,
Fellow Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

At the outset, let me thank our Indonesian hosts for their hospitality and hard work, to welcome us and set up the 144th IPU Assembly in difficult times of a global pandemic.

It was good to hear from my Czech colleague that the Czech Republic will use the Presidency in the Council of the European Union to work of the issue of climate change.

We need dialogue and action to stop global warming. 2021 was one of the seven hottest years on record. Climate change is unfolding in front of our eyes, and it is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century.

Since the 1992 “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro and the signing of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) there, climate change has been on the political agenda. But, it seems we have been unable to succeed in the last 30 years and we don’t have much time left. We have to act now, locally, on national level and worldwide mitigating climate change.

We are facing barriers to effective climate action. Global environmental agreements, such as the Paris agreement, are non-binding and thus lack the teeth to punish those who fail to deliver. On the national level, we too often focus on quick wins in our short electoral cycles, although effectively tackling climate change requires long-term commitments for future generations.

There are no easy solutions for such complex – cross border – challenges. But we are a resilient, innovative, and determined species. Parliaments around the globe are powerful institutions who play a big role in this crisis:

Firstly, as policy makers. We don’t have to wait for the annual global climate summits, we can all act now with smart domestic legislation. Parliaments must make full use of their powers for a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Through exercising oversight, making laws and allocating public resources, parliaments directly contribute to climate commitments around the world.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic offers a historic opportunity for a green transition. But not only the pandemic may pave the way. Many European countries depend on imported natural gas from Russia. More than ever, getting rid of such dependences on fossil energy is essential. Green policy is also security policy around the globe.

Secondly, as representative institutions, parliaments have the responsibility to bridge the gap between governments and citizens. Parliamentarians need to engage with their constituents, especially women, youth, and other underrepresented groups. We need to listen to those who take to the street for climate action!

In Austria, citizens have been actively participating in democratic climate protection efforts. Despite the ongoing pandemic, almost 400,000 people out of a total population of 8.9 million signed a climate protection petition in 2020, making it one of the most successful petitions in Austria's history. As a result, in March 2021, after an intensive discussion in the Austrian parliament, we adopted a resolution including a comprehensive list of measures, and called upon the government for action. Finally, it was agreed to set up a representative citizen assembly (called "climate council"). Since January 2022, this citizen assembly has been consulting experts and working on concrete suggestions for the government. Through direct democracy, the people of Austria support the government's climate ambitions.

Thirdly, the Austrian parliament also actively follows a strategy to reduce its environmental impact. Let me briefly mention that the historical parliamentary building is currently being renovated with a special focus on environmental protection. The parliament also committed to climate-neutral procurement. The Austrian Parliament wants to be a best practice in this field.

Climate change has risen to one of the greatest challenges the world has ever faced. It is already affecting every region of the Earth, but we know that its worst impacts will hit future generations. Still, I am optimistic. If humans are the primary cause of global warming, this also means we are the ones in control!

Discussing climate change is necessary and important. Concrete and strong actions in all our countries, regions and communities are decisive for a good future for all mankind!