

IPU: MOBILISING PARLIAMENTS TO ACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

BACKGROUND

No country, indeed nobody, in this Assembly is a stranger to climate change. The evidence of climate change worsening the conditions on this earth is clear for all to see. From severe weather conditions, including rising temperatures, warming oceans, increasing sea levels and glacier fissures and retreat, it is evident that climate change is a threat to our very survival. Science tells us that this is only the beginning and if we don't take action now, the damage would be irreversible.

In February 2022, Working Group II, of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, released its report assessing the damages of climate change and the conclusion is crystal clear: **We are simply not doing enough**. The report suggests that we are at a point where adaptation is becoming more feasible than mitigation. In the words of the U.N. Secretary-General, António Guterres, "Adaptation saves lives". Climate change is affecting the world faster than hitherto anticipated. Human activity is the main contributor to global warming and yet we are behind in our efforts to control this situation. Continuing on this path, would further exacerbate the rise in temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, more frequent and intense droughts, heatwaves and so on.

Countries have continually pledged to work towards mitigating climate change. What is required however, is decisive action. Financial constraints to tackling this issue now are often cited, and yet, paradoxically, it would become much more expensive to deal with it in future if we do not curb the menace now.

PARLIAMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As Parliamentarians, through our legislative, representative and oversight functions, we can effect changes which would secure for ourselves and posterity equality of opportunity and prosperity.

- **Legislative**

The unique ability of Parliament to pass laws, allows us to formulate legislative frameworks, which are consistent with national climate goals and International Climate Agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. There is the need to reassess existing climate policies, identify gaps and make the appropriate amendments where required. Where there is reason to consider new

legislation, it is imperative that we structure our policies to tailor-fit our individual climate situations, while complementing international climate change targets. Countries require distinct approaches to climate policies, and these policies must take into account the local economic, social and political factors.

Effective climate legislation therefore, should be based on extensive research which hinges on the effects of such legislation on the environment, as well as on the socio-economic well-being of the people. Climate legislation should therefore take into account economic structure, legislative culture, climate exposure and also the social conditions of the people.

- **Representative**

Parliamentarians are representatives of the people and it is important that we use our leadership position to increase awareness of climate change, at the local level. Strong dialogue between us, the MPs and the people we represent, would accentuate their appreciation and buy-in of the crisis. Understanding government policies and what the people can do, both as individuals and collectively to support this cause, can only be achieved through consistent and persistent interaction between us Parliamentarians, and the people. Parliamentarians can hugely impact information dissemination by supporting information campaigns and holding stakeholder engagements.

Parliaments, including the relevant parliamentary committees, have to share findings and reports with the public, in addition to holding direct consultations with citizens and key stakeholders such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the Media, and in our case for example, our Chiefs as well as Faith-Based Organizations. These stakeholders should have access to Parliament, and parliamentarians, to share concerns and observations, in the recognition that their experience, research and expertise can aid the work of Parliament, in its fight against climate change.

- **Oversight**

Parliamentarians bear the responsibility of holding the Executive Arm of Government accountable, in the latter's bid to fulfil its objectives, according to legislation and budgetary allocations. Oversight is an important aspect of our job as it allows us to scrutinize the performance of our governments, as they implement national climate-related policies and honour international commitments.

Therefore, Parliamentarians must be committed to ensuring transparency and accountability, using all appropriate vehicles, including Questions, Motions, Statements and the Committees. Ministers responsible for handling climate change issues should be required to report to Parliament and its relevant Committees, at determined times, on their progress and challenges. This, in turn, should lead to a periodic review of national climate change targets. Furthermore, parliamentarians should ensure clear legislative provisions for monitoring and enforcement.

CALL TO ACTION

Climate change is a complex phenomenon to address. Parliaments have a key role to play in the mitigation of, and the adaptation to, climate change. Fortunately parliamentarians are well-positioned to act and deliver.

Today, the world is facing a multiplicity of challenges. The threat posed by climate change juts out strongly because it is a matter of survival. The world must come together to respond to the use of sustainable fuels because coal and fossil fuels are releasing pure acids into the atmosphere. Deforestation, due to unmitigated tree felling, poor farming practices, including over-grazing and bushfires, must be things of the past. Manufacturing industries and transportation are necessities of life, but the homicidal emissions must be done away with, by resorting to renewable energy sources.

Significant medium and long term planning is required to deal with climate change. Should we ignore this Call, the risk of floods, droughts, heatwaves, rising sea levels, air, water and food pollution, among other dire consequences, will increase and plague all living creatures, until we become extinct.