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Regional Seminar on climate change and disaster risk reduction for Parliaments of the Caribbean

Paramaribo, 5-6 November 2018



DE
NATIONALE
ASSEMBLÉE
VAN DE REPUBLIEK SURINAME

Paramaribo Declaration on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

*Presented by the Rapporteur of the Regional Seminar, Hon. B. Scotland,
Speaker of the National Assembly of Guyana*

We, parliamentarians from the Caribbean, gathered in Paramaribo, Suriname, on 5 and 6 November 2018, for the Regional Seminar on climate change and disaster risk reduction for Parliaments of the Caribbean. The seminar was jointly organized by the National Assembly of Suriname and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). We are grateful to the National Assembly of Suriname for hosting the event and receiving us with warm hospitality.

The Seminar addressed the challenges posed by climate change and the role that parliamentarians can play to address the issue, especially in the Caribbean region. We discussed how crucial it was to tackle those challenges and how national parliaments can take concrete actions, particularly in terms of legislation, to respond to climate change, reduce the risks of natural disaster and fulfil relevant international commitments. The Seminar placed special emphasis on the initiatives for adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction adopted by us, parliamentarians from the Caribbean. We also discussed implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change through national laws and corresponding budget allocations.

We commended the IPU Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change, which provided us with strategic guidance about measures to be devised to implement disaster risk reduction policies, environmental legislation and full implementation of the Paris Agreement at the national level. We learnt about recent developments in the international climate change regime and gained a better understanding of what was being done in the region, at the parliamentary level, to combat climate change and tackle natural disasters. We acknowledged the importance of parliamentary cooperation and exchange of experiences and committed to continue learning from each other and exchanging with fellow parliamentarians from the region and the world.

We also conducted a field visit to the Commewijne coastal area in Suriname, where adaptive measures to counter the effects of climate change were currently being implemented. The visit provided us with concrete examples of feasible solutions that can mitigate and prevent climate change effects.

We proactively engaged in the discussions and agreed to take further action to address climate change and implement more effective disaster risk reduction policies at the national level. With that in mind, we agreed on the following:

- All national plans and policies need to be developed in consultation with citizens—women and men alike—so that they reflect their real needs and expectations. Special attention should be given to identifying and including in the consultations young people, vulnerable groups and hard-to-reach populations so as to ensure that follow-up actions leave no one behind.
- Parliaments should ensure that legislation on climate change and disaster risk reduction involves a comprehensive and synergistic approach, while taking into account the specific national conditions and circumstances and strict respect for human rights. Priority should be given to adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures in national plans, with a particular focus on conserving and replanting mangroves as a proven technique, which helps to protect coastal communities and environments by reducing the impact of strong waves and erosion.

- Each parliament should identify effective ways to hold government to account for national strategies and policies aimed at combating climate change and reducing disaster risk. Parliaments should increase their use of oversight mechanisms, such as parliamentary hearings, question time and plenary reports to assess the impact of government policies and programmes through a collaborative approach.
- Without concrete responses, climate change could place populations at risk, endanger household and government revenues and increase poverty, thereby causing social fragility and further inequalities. All these factors need to be taken into account in relevant legislation and programmes.
- Climate change presents a serious threat to human health and well-being. It can affect health not only through direct natural hazards such as floods and hurricanes, but also through more complex consequences such as communicable diseases, food insecurity and internal displacement.
- Parliaments should take more robust and concerted actions to respond to climate change by optimizing their legislative and oversight roles, and also by enhancing cooperation and partnership in order to share information and experiences on the regional and global levels. Active participation in the existing regional and global parliamentary networks on climate change and disaster risk reduction will help us to further develop our capacities and take collective action.
- Disaster risk and environmental degradation present important challenges to our region. Disaster risk reduction and environmental protection therefore need to be part and parcel of the parliamentary engagement on climate change and national education programmes. Parliaments need to ensure that legislation protects the environment and that prevention measures are included in the budget to avert the impact of climate change and natural disasters.
- The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Parliaments of the Caribbean and other regions should form a strong coalition in order to make their voices heard and have greater impact on the international arena. The IPU should devise customized capacity-building programmes to cater to their specific needs.
- Regional and global action mechanisms should be established and implemented in order to ensure effective action by the world's largest polluters in order to substantially decrease their disproportionate greenhouse gas emissions to the extent and within the timeframe indicated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In order to turn words into action, we will bring this Declaration to the attention of our parliamentary peers through all possible channels and urge the IPU to do so too. We also undertake to bring it to the attention of other relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society and the private sector, and agree to organize follow-up regional seminars, under IPU auspices, on a regular basis, to take stock of progress made in this field.

As a unique platform for parliamentary dialogue and cooperation at global level, we urge the IPU to continue promoting parliamentary engagement in combating climate change and reducing disaster risk and to help facilitate the creation of spaces for parliamentary exchange in this domain. We request the IPU to bring our conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the global parliamentary community at the 140th IPU Assembly in Doha.