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## Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for the Parliaments in the Caribbean Region



### **Strengthening parliamentary action on the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago), 5 and 6 December 2019**

## **Port of Spain Declaration**

We, members of the Parliaments of Barbados, Cuba, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, gathered in Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago) on 5 and 6 December 2019 for the Second Regional Seminar for Parliaments of the Caribbean entitled *Strengthening parliamentary action on the Sustainable Development Goals*.

Jointly organized by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the seminar built on the conclusions of our previous regional seminar held in Paramaribo (Suriname) in 2018 and enabled us to continue to develop dialogue and parliamentary cooperation on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In doing so, we took full account of the recommendations of the 2018 Paramaribo Declaration. We welcomed the active engagement of all participants as they shared their good practices and lessons learned, and we benefited from the rich contribution of Speakers of parliament, parliamentarians, and experts from the United Nations, the IPU, technical institutes, and civil society.

We debated four issues of particular importance as our countries implement the SDGs: (1) Parliamentary engagement on SDG implementation in the region; (2) Health emergencies in the Caribbean region and the role of parliaments in preventing and responding to global health threats; (3) Taking action on climate change and disaster risk reduction and preparedness; and (4) Innovation in parliament.

We identified a number of specific characteristics of our region that impact the way in which we respond to these challenges. The Caribbean has traditionally been the scene of extreme weather events, which are exacerbated by climate change, and the parliaments of the Caribbean often have limited resources to address the range of challenges they face. With this in mind, we adopted the following recommendations to advance parliamentary engagement with the SDGs in our respective countries:

1. The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets present a global framework intended to help focus and coordinate national policies towards sustainable and all-inclusive development from the economic, social and environmental perspectives. One of the key challenges faced by most countries is a silo approach to issues within ministries and parliamentary committees, as well as by civil society and other actors, which must be overcome in order to achieve the SDGs.
2. Evidence shows that countries that domesticate the SDGs as well as those that establish institutional mechanisms are ahead of others in terms of SDG implementation. We were encouraged to learn that many governments in our region have created permanent or interim structures to coordinate SDG implementation nationally, or have given a new mandate to existing institutions. We encourage parliaments in countries where there is no such mechanism to act urgently to create an enabling legislative framework for institutional coordination on the SDGs.
3. To help ensure progress on the SDGs, we encourage parliaments to analyse, at the earliest opportunity, their capacities to institutionalize the SDGs and ensure that their strategy is adequate, comprehensive and effective. The IPU-UNDP SDG self-assessment toolkit has proved an important catalyst for parliamentary action on the SDGs. We strongly encourage all parliaments to use this toolkit to design appropriate strategies and mechanisms for better

engagement with SDG implementation.

4. Good governance and democratic institutions are fundamental to sustainable development. They provide the foundation for just, peaceful and inclusive societies, as well as socially responsible and environmentally friendly development. Effective and open parliaments are key institutions of democracy that provide constitutional, regulatory and legal frameworks for enhanced, transparent and people-centred sustainable development.
5. Parliaments should rely on data and evidence in exercising their functions on the SDGs, particularly oversight. Special emphasis should be placed on developing parliamentary mechanisms for effective partnerships with civil society and other actors that work in communities, as well as on building the statistical capacity of each country to ensure successful tracking of progress and evaluation.
6. Climate change is a cross-cutting issue. It affects our ability to achieve the SDGs, and countries in the Caribbean are among the most vulnerable in the world to the impacts of climate change. Our region is facing rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, more extreme weather events and rising sea levels. These environmental changes will directly impact sectors such as health, sanitation, agriculture, tourism and infrastructure. We reaffirm the Paramaribo Declaration and its recommendations, and we will continue to build a culture of prevention and hold government to account for national strategies and policies aimed at combating climate change.
7. Parliaments play a vital role in overseeing the effective national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, namely the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Escazú Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. We reinforce the urgent need for parliaments to use their budgetary and legislative powers to create an enabling environment for national ratification and implementation of these agreements, including through mechanisms for disaster risk reduction and climate finance.
8. We recognize that the health and well-being of citizens are intrinsically linked to climate change. The changing climate presents the region with new health challenges: public health can be compromised when there is a lack of access to adequate fresh water and nutrition; extreme weather events are linked to the transmission of diseases; greater variability in rainfall can lead to an increase in some vector- and water-borne diseases; and the changing climate increases air pollution. We note with concern that people living with HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable and marginalized populations are especially affected by these threats. Parliaments should ensure that core public health capacities effectively detect and respond to threats and are sufficiently funded. Parliaments should also promote greater regional cooperation in the prevention of and response to health emergencies.
9. Health security goes beyond the traditional health sector; multisectoral coordination for health emergency preparedness is critical in accelerating the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) and enhancing global health security. In this context, parliaments play an important role in implementing the IHR and scaling up country ownership of health emergency preparedness, and 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 cross-sectoral collaborative approach.
10. As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians have a responsibility to make sure citizens are familiar with the national sustainable development strategy and are consulted regularly with regard to its implementation. In order to effectively engage with citizens, parliamentarians should develop clear, understandable and focused messages to ensure effective communication on the SDGs, and should serve as champions of the sustainable development agenda.

11. We commit to continually strive to make our parliaments more effective, accountable and transparent institutions. We are convinced of the need to develop innovative approaches in our work, notably in the ways we work with citizens to identify and address their needs. We recognize that we need to make creative use of the limited resources available, including by enhancing cooperation between our parliaments, engaging young people in efforts to achieve the SDGs, and drawing on the potential of digital technologies. We welcome the initiative of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to establish a Caribbean regional hub within the IPU's Centre for Innovation in Parliament to further these aims.
12. In order to inspire action on the SDGs, we will bring this Declaration to the attention of our colleagues in parliament through all possible channels. We also undertake to bring the document to the attention of other relevant stakeholders.
13. We urge the IPU to bring our conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the global parliamentary community and ensure follow-up through its programmes and Assemblies. We also urge the IPU to continue to facilitate exchanges of good practices and experiences among parliamentarians at all levels in order to inspire action and maximize the contribution of parliaments to the implementation of the SDGs.
14. We urge the IPU to continue to promote parliamentary engagement with the SDGs and to pursue its work with the United Nations and other relevant partners towards the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.