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General Debate

Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments

Concept Note

For over a year now, the world has been struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated health and socio-economic crises. Globally, there have been at least 110 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2.5 million deaths.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people's wellbeing, disrupted societies and economies, exacerbated the already high level of inequalities and further widened the gap between developed and developing countries. It has exposed significant cracks in the multilateral system of global governance and turned a spotlight on States' capacity to protect their people. All of this is unfolding against the backdrop of an unprecedented environmental crisis that has already rendered people more vulnerable in many parts of the world.

Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow will require a strategic approach that addresses the immediate impact of the polyandemic, i.e. the multiple overlapping crises that COVID-19 has provoked, and tackles structural problems, while rethinking the foundations of the pre-pandemic world and paving the way for a post-pandemic world that is resilient, equitable, smart, green, inclusive and fair.

Extensive analysis and research have shown the dramatic effects of COVID-19 on the world economy, with an unprecedented impact on poverty, employment, trade and key sectors channelling foreign direct investments. Moreover, the latest data shows that the pandemic has been hampering the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pushing critical development targets beyond reach. People who were already living in vulnerable situations, and in particular the poor, women, youth and marginalized groups, bear the brunt of the collapse across all sectors. These groups may face further challenges if the dramatic effects of the pandemic remain unaddressed.

The pandemic has been impacting and transforming human relationships with nature, on both a general and individual level. There are calls for the global economy to be rebuilt in ways that restore the appropriate balance between human beings and nature, which involves a new way of thinking about aspects such as sustainable production and consumption, environmental preservation, the role of the care economy and of the circular economy, and the definition of the public good.

Equitable access to vaccines is proving to be a crucial test for international cooperation, and will determine how quickly countries are able to enter the post-COVID recovery phase. It is estimated that a status quo or the potential for a second year of crisis would have dire socio-economic repercussions, increase pressure on governments to contain the storm, which may come at the expense of the capacity and legitimacy of State institutions, and increase inequality that may in turn lead to rising tensions within and between countries.

¹ World Health Organization, <https://covid19.who.int>.

The recovery phase should be driven by actionable interventions and reforms that are in line with international agreements. It is the general view that the pandemic should not be used as an excuse to divert attention from the implementation of the SDGs. The Agenda 2030 and the Global Goals readily offer a unique framework that can help develop, implement and coordinate policies towards inclusive development that leaves no one behind. Because of their comprehensive and interlinked nature, the SDGs should be the foundation on which COVID-19 recovery strategies can be developed that not only address the current global health crisis but also the imbalances that are still preventing our world from being fully sustainable, fair and equal. Successful implementation of the SDGs has the potential to shield the world from the devastating consequences of crises such as the one currently confronting us.

Moreover, a people-centred and resilient post-pandemic development model must address the unequal and devastating impact of COVID-19 on women, particularly their engagement in the paid workforce and their financial security now and in the future. A conversation on a post-pandemic world could consider the establishment of a new social contract between people and government, grounded in human rights and underpinned by equity and equality. Societies should be prepared and equipped, in terms of capacities and capabilities, to innovate for durable solutions. Above all, democracies should be empowered to reconcile the dilemmas of the pre-pandemic world and shape a better future.²

In this context, it has been decided that the overall theme of the 142nd IPU Assembly will be the question of how to overcome the pandemic today and build a better tomorrow. It will provide a framework for taking stock of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and for looking at how parliaments can play a central role in post-pandemic recovery efforts.

The Standing Committees, as well as the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young MPs, are invited to examine these issues from their own perspectives (peace and security, sustainable development, democracy and human rights, gender and youth) and identify possible courses for parliamentary action. Member Parliaments, too, will be invited to share their experiences and good practices going forward.

In the context of the Assembly, participants will be invited to reflect on a number of key aspects, including:

- The main components of the recovery phase and opportunities to advance towards a green economy.
- Vaccine accessibility as a public good.
- Renewed multilateral cooperation and dialogue to tackle global challenges, including possible future pandemics.
- Building resilience and tackling the root causes of grievances, enabling communities to build back better.
- Ways and opportunities to prioritise investment in human security – increasing budget allocations for health and education, limiting military expenditures.
- Mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on democracy and human rights and identifying key actions that parliaments should take to restore faith in democracy.
- Ensuring an equitable recovery through gender-responsive policies and women's leadership.
- Placing the needs and interests of young people at the centre of efforts for a sustainable, resilient and equitable recovery.

² Sources for the Note: International Monetary Fund, "World Economic Outlook Update", January 2021; World Bank, "Global Economic Prospects", January 2021; World Bank, "Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021", 11 January 2021; International Labour Organization, "ILO Monitor and the world of work", Seventh edition, 25 January 2021; World Trade Organization, "Trade shows signs of rebound from COVID-19, recovery still uncertain", 6 October 2020; UNDP, "Putting the UN Framework for Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 Into Action", June 2020; Economist Intelligence Unit, "Down but not out? Globalisation and the threat of COVID-19", 2020; Economist Intelligence Unit, "Where have all the fundamentals gone? Investing post-Covid", 2020; Foreign Affairs, "Capitalism After the Pandemic: Getting Recovery Right", November/December 2020.