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PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE (COP26)

7 November 2021, Glasgow

Outcome document

1. We, parliamentarians from around the world, gathered in Glasgow at the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the 26th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), express deep concern that the need to act on the climate crisis is becoming ever more urgent, and seek to amplify international calls for concerted and coordinated climate action by all States. We strongly urge all Parties to make COP26 a turning point by adopting and implementing ambitious commitments for a green, inclusive and sustainable pandemic recovery which also ensures global temperature increase does not exceed 1.5°C. Responsible stewardship of the planet and the wellbeing of humanity must be at the heart of all political ambition and activity.
2. Under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), following the agreements achieved at the Parliamentary Meeting at the Italian Parliament and responding to the Joint Appeal of various religious leaders and scientists presented by His Holiness Pope Francis on 9 October 2021, we have assembled on the occasion of COP26 in Glasgow under the UK Presidency on 7 November 2021. Our position is founded on the scientific findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), including the August 2021 Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report, which shows that greenhouse gas emissions from previous human activity are responsible for approximately 1.1°C of warming. In addition, in this report, described as a “code red” for humanity by the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the IPCC states with virtual certainty that irreversible change is already underway, and that the global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5°C of warming by 2040.
3. This rise in temperature would trigger irreversible damage to our planet and endanger biodiversity. The threat of such dire consequences, including for human health and well-being, drives our common determination for action. To this end, we endorse all the objectives of the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC, on adaptation, means of implementation and mitigation, such as to keep the global average temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. We strongly support the requirement to secure net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Net zero can only be achieved through international collaboration, holding all nations to ambitious commitments based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances. This should include supporting innovation and technology transfer as well as strengthening transparency and accountability, notably through parliamentary oversight and legislative scrutiny.

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4. Parliaments, with their core legislative, oversight, budgetary and representation functions, are key to ensuring the implementation of the climate change objectives contained in the Paris Agreement, under the auspices of the UNFCCC, as well as climate change related components of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Parliaments are essential for the translation of international climate change commitments into country-level action, and as climate change is a global issue which transcends borders, strong inter-parliamentary cooperation is crucial for finding global solutions that ensure all countries can meet these unavoidable challenges. This includes mitigating and managing the risk of disasters and extreme events exacerbated by climate change. Parliamentarians also have an essential role to play to ensure that national authorities have planned for comprehensive risk-management that can address multi-hazard risks. Accounting for the diversity of our parliaments' mandates and functions, parliamentarians can also be guided by common working methods and norms, including those facilitated and promoted by the IPU in the form of handbooks and toolkits produced for the use of parliamentarians. We call upon all parliamentarians to use these tools to ensure that their countries' national climate commitments and international obligations are transparently scrutinized, widely debated and, most importantly, upheld in full.

5. We encourage parliaments to share best practice for undertaking climate impact assessments of all legislation as a matter of routine process. Such requirements for greater environmental accountability should empower parliaments in their work to encourage increased public and private sector funding for research and development, and wider utilization of clean energy technologies. The economic and social benefits of investing in green technologies to support renewable energy, sustainable transport and environmentally responsible means of manufacturing and food production are now clear and unquestionable and should be central to the economic planning and development objectives of all nations.

6. We note that parliaments in some countries have declared the existence of a "climate change emergency", which has emboldened governments to be more ambitious in their environmental goals. Initiatives such as these and other inclusive public outreach mechanisms, like people-led "climate committees", which often work in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, grassroots movements and climate activists, help underscore the value of parliamentary voices. Parliamentarians should also encourage an all-of-society approach to comprehensively manage climate and disaster risks. Parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy through the IPU and other relevant parliamentary organizations is key to raising awareness of the complexities of the interrelated challenges of climate and disaster risk and the need for urgent action to address the serious impacts on many of our communities, now and in the years to come.

7. As legislators, we must ensure our countries can take full advantage of the opportunities for a green post-COVID-19 recovery. While the pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, particularly for women and girls, marginalized groups and indigenous communities, it also helped reaffirm the importance of an inclusive, equal and sustainable society. Post-pandemic recovery and rebuilding strategies provide an essential opportunity to advance green solutions to both national challenges and common international objectives that we cannot afford to miss. The agreed undertakings addressing climate challenges can guide us towards a sustainable recovery, now being better prepared and determined to "build back better" for the benefit of all. These goals can also be met by changing our habits, reducing waste, and encouraging a circular economy and short supply chains. All countries are encouraged to continue enhancing and updating their Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies, making them more ambitious and aligned to address the changed circumstances created by the pandemic and its impacts.

8. If the last two years have taught us anything, it is that "prevention is better than cure", applying equally to our own health as it does to the health of our planet. By enacting laws and overseeing recovery policies and strategies, parliamentarians have a fundamental role in embracing the opportunity to "build back better", ensuring current economic recovery endeavours are aligned to the commitments of the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals. Legislative approval of national COVID-19 economic stimulus packages offers parliamentarians an avenue for promoting a green economy, increasing disaster resilience and harmonizing economic and environmental policies.

9. We must also recognize that biodiversity loss and climate change increase the risk of zoonotic transmission, the consequences of which can lead to serious disease outbreaks and pandemics. Climate change and global biodiversity loss, therefore, pose a significant risk to public health and human well-being. By adopting circular economy models and using natural resources sustainably and responsibly, we can protect against future pandemics and better shield populations. To this degree, we recognize that the pressures placed on health services, particularly those of developing countries, can be alleviated by green policy measures, complementing efforts to improve access and equity through a movement towards universal health coverage (UHC).

10. We recognize that environmental issues are cross-cutting, with implications for all social, economic and security policies, and climate justice and intergenerational equity must be central to achieving all our national goals and ambitions. We must pay particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in our societies, particularly in recognition of the obligations stemming from the landmark decision of the UN Human Rights Council on 8 October 2021 that access to a healthy environment is a fundamental human right. The world we leave our children should be one that is better and fairer for all, not one ravaged by our policy failures, missed opportunities and denial. The global pandemic has created an incentive for countries to adopt more inclusive and sustainable models of consumption and production to drive economic recovery, enhance social cohesion and address climate change challenges. This can be achieved through more effective urban and rural planning, harnessing the potential offered by digitalization to provide and receive services online, reducing the need to travel and, as a result, cutting emissions. Sustainable urban development measures are also vital to address climate impacts on slum-dwelling communities due to their specific vulnerabilities. Parliaments acknowledge the vital role played by local governments in mitigation and adaptation policies. They must promote strong, adequately financed partnerships with counterparts and institutional stakeholders at the sub-national level particularly in transitioning to net zero and encouraging sustainable development.

11. We recognize the correlation between better environmental protection and improving the well-being of women and girls around the world. According to UN agencies, women are fourteen times more likely to be victims of a natural disaster and make up 70% of people living below the poverty line. The protection of the environment, coupled with full and complete empowerment of women, can mitigate this systemic injustice. To make this change, societies will need to confront existing social norms and habits which obstruct women's rights, in parallel to adopting more environmentally sensitive policies, in order to achieve equity, justice and inclusive conditions for future generations. We must be particularly mindful of environmental impacts leading to social dislocation, which might undermine achievements in gender equality. We must guard against sexual and gender-based violence, reduced opportunities for girls' education, forced marriages and negative impacts on maternal, newborn and child health. A key measure for parliaments in promoting gender equality is to follow the practice of gender budgeting in their scrutiny and allocation of public finances, with the aim of promoting economic equity between women and men.

12. Climate change poses a serious risk to human security at many levels. Concerted climate action can be key to securing stability, avoiding or mitigating conflict, preventing climate-induced migration, and resolving national and regional conflicts and crises. Preventing further climate change can also be a crucial factor in securing a new and more inclusive wave of multilateral participation, while driving support for the socio-economic advancement of developing countries. Special attention must be paid to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and other States susceptible to serious, if not existential, risk because of specific geographic or climatic vulnerabilities. Sea-level rise, extreme weather events, natural hazards, drought, rapid glacial melt, wildfire and flood all exacerbate development challenges and erase decades of social and economic progress. Due attention must be paid to water resource issues, as a vital part of any global effort to address the impacts of climate change. In the same regard, there must be greater priority accorded to the protection of oceans by integrating policy on climate change, mitigation and adaptation, maritime security, fisheries, and ocean biodiversity as part of a cohesive global approach, particularly to better serve the longer-term interests of SIDS and coastal communities.

13. We strongly support the goal of reaching net zero. At the same time, we are aware of the challenges surrounding its achievement. We recognize the necessity for governments to have varied targets and individual climate plans based upon the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national and local circumstances.

However, this provision for varying levels of ambition should not undermine efforts to achieve net zero globally, and we would be concerned if carbon leakage occurred as a result. We recognize the important role of putting a price on carbon emissions to achieve reductions and encourage all countries to do so based on their respective national circumstances. Another risk to climate ambition is transnational emissions, which so far have not been accounted for in international negotiations, particularly those of the aviation and shipping industries. This is also relevant to the environmental impacts of global trade, which must be a core factor considered in future multilateral trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO), including that such agreements incentivize green trade, address the negative impact of subsidies, endorse the positive benefits of renewable energy and facilitate technology transfer.

14. We call for the introduction of a mechanism to calculate transnational emissions which fairly and transparently apportions national responsibility accounting for these emissions in assessing global reductions. We also strongly support the creation of a transnational mechanism to monitor and take stock of the implementation of the Paris Agreement with the aim of assessing the world's collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the Agreement and its long-term goals, welcoming the contribution which will be made by the first UNFCCC Global Stocktake, publishing its findings in 2023. We urge countries to maximize existing monitoring and reporting processes, such as the Sendai Framework Monitor, to feed into the Global Stocktake. The adoption of an equitable market mechanism through the finalization of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement will provide an important tool to counteract climate dumping and provide for functioning global carbon markets to enable achievement of collective emissions reduction targets. This mechanism must avoid the risk of double counting and reflect the need for cost efficiency including through flexibility in the carbon market.

15. It is essential that we mobilize sufficient climate finance at COP26. We call for increased, predictable and sustainable financing for developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and have significant capacity constraints, such as least developed countries and SIDS, so that these countries can adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change, to which they are vulnerable. We call on developed countries to meet their existing climate commitments, in particular the goal of jointly mobilizing USD 100 billion each year in order to improve confidence in funding commitments, taking into account the negotiations that will begin during COP26 on the new collective quantified funding goal from a floor of USD 100 billion a year. As an urgent necessity, we support ambitious and transparent mechanisms for financial, technological and capacity-building cooperation with developing countries. These mechanisms should aim to remove any obstacles to accessing dedicated climate-related financing to enable the effective implementation of climate policies with a key focus on adaptation rather than mitigation. We also support investment in science and technology that advances carbon sequestration and conversion to other materials as effective means of climate change mitigation.

16. We urge countries to rethink the international financial architecture through innovative mechanisms. The multilateral climate finance architecture must be fair, transparent, equitable, and based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It must recognize and ensure the predictability and availability of sufficient financial resources to meet the needs and priorities identified by developing countries, both for mitigation and adaptation. New and additional climate finance resources are important. Some innovative instruments could include the mobilization of concessional and non-reimbursable resources channelled through multilateral and bilateral banks with agile and transparent processes, payments for ecosystem services and debt swaps for climate action. In addition, the reallocation of Special Drawing Rights could be considered.

17. Sustainable finance should create a level playing field for vulnerable countries, and we urge the Parties to make significant steps in utilizing the Santiago Network for the provision of technical assistance to help avert, minimize and address loss and damage as part of an inclusive, comprehensive and ambitious COP26 outcome. We recognize the additional burden that high levels of public debt place on developing countries, particularly SIDS. Likewise, it is necessary to establish frameworks and mechanisms to deal efficiently, equitably and predictably with situations of unsustainable debt. We call for greater fiscal space to be granted and for debt sustainability to be guaranteed so that these States can meet their climate policy commitments.

18. We emphasize the role that science and technology play in implementing policies that support adaptation and mitigation. More specifically, the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) predictive models can increase our understanding of complex climate change phenomena and the future consequences they may have, all the while protecting the rights and freedoms of our citizens, including privacy rights. We welcome investment in, and use of, such scientific and technological resources to assist energy transition, adaptation and mitigation policies and projects, and support comprehensive efforts to ensure appropriate technology transfer to developing countries, including vulnerable States. While the opportunity to secure a net zero pathway is narrowing, it is still possible to achieve with the immediate and large-scale deployment of green, safe, sustainable and efficient energy technologies, combined with an international commitment to accelerate research and innovation. As stated in the most recent report by the International Energy Agency (IEA), a fast and large-scale energy transition cannot be achieved without citizen engagement. The support and participation of citizens is essential to ensure the adoption and financing of green and sustainable alternatives, including taking full advantage of advances in renewable energy.

19. Climate change also poses a significant threat to global food security, which is a particular concern for the world's most vulnerable populations and indigenous peoples. Any loss in biodiversity, as well as changing weather patterns, reduces crop yields and results in food shortages. At the same time, agriculture is one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss and climate change, adversely affecting food security. The global response to climate change today, therefore, determines how we feed future generations tomorrow. Such food insecurity makes it impossible to eradicate poverty, improve nutrition and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We strongly support the Food and Agriculture Organization's strategy on adaptation and mitigation in agricultural sectors (encompassing crops, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and forestry) and call for a global commitment to its principles of assisting the transformation of farming and food production methods in developing countries as a key to climate action. At the same time, we stress that designing sustainable, healthy, diverse and resilient food systems will determine our progress in reaching our climate and biodiversity goals. We therefore support the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and highlight the need for further ambitious actions towards sustainable food systems globally.

20. United by our common goals and purpose as parliamentarians, we have gathered in Glasgow in parallel to COP26 to reiterate our abiding commitment to democracy and multilateralism in the long-standing spirit of the IPU. We utilize the IPU's standing as the world's oldest multilateral political organization, founded on the important principle that international cooperation and dialogue are the most effective means to address our common global challenges, as our platform to send a clear and unequivocal message. Faced with the existential threat of climate change to many of the most vulnerable people in our countries and as nations emerge from the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic with renewed vision and resolve to "build back better", we urge our respective national leadership and expert negotiators to seize the moment in Glasgow. An emergency confronts us and we face a moral imperative to take the fullest advantage of the United Kingdom's leadership and commitment as COP President, in partnership with Italy, to resolve all outstanding issues from the Paris Agreement, the time for empty promises and hollow pronouncements has passed and action is needed without any further delay. We must pressure our governments to attain the highest level of ambition to protect the planet and safeguard the security and prosperity of our citizens, now and for future generations, and hold them resolutely to their commitments.