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Concept note for the General Debate on:

Getting to zero: Mobilizing parliaments to act on climate change

The climate crisis is worsening and urgent action is needed to minimize its most devastating potential impacts. Climate change is already affecting every region of the world and continues to intensify at a rapid pace. Recent findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that unless there are immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, or even 2 degrees Celsius, will be unreachable.¹ The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) reaffirmed that countries are not doing enough to tackle the climate crisis.

Human activity continues to be a major driver of climate change. Rising emissions can be attributed to unsustainable practices including burning fossil fuels, increased livestock farming and deforestation. Major changes are needed to our economic structures, energy use practices and food systems to limit climate change before it is too late.

Strong political leadership is essential for overcoming the climate crisis, including net-zero emissions, i.e. a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. Parliaments can, and are being urged to, use their legislative and budgetary powers to ensure strong laws are put in place and that there is adequate funding to support climate action. Through their oversight functions, they can also hold their government to account on its national and international commitments on climate change, including those made through the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda. As representatives of the people, parliaments can ensure the needs of constituents are met, particularly those most at-risk from climate change impacts. Parliaments can also work to reduce their own emissions and become greener institutions to further encourage sustainability.

Given that climate change knows no boundaries, strong inter-parliamentary cooperation is critical. Through constructive, international dialogue on climate change, it is possible to we can build solidarity and find joint solutions for a more sustainable world.

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>

The General Debate will provide an opportunity for delegates to share their experiences on climate action at the national and international level and exchange insights on strengthening the parliamentary response to climate change, particularly in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and accelerating the green transition.

Questions:

- Despite increasing political will, what barriers continue to exist that hinder effective climate action and the implementation of climate agreements? What additional capacities are needed, including within parliaments themselves, to strengthen the response to climate change?
- How can the COVID-19 recovery period be used to accelerate the green transition? In particular, how can economic systems and approaches to energy and resource use be transformed for more sustainable outcomes and how can parliaments support that transition?
- What types of innovation are occurring within parliaments to make their practices and operations greener and what efforts are being made to reduce their own emissions at an institutional level?
- How can parliaments better ensure that the needs of the most at-risk members of the population, including women, youth and other underrepresented groups in society, are addressed as part of climate action?