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Parliamentary Forum at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The mid-point toward the SDGs: taking stock of parliamentary action

Tuesday, 18 July
Conference Room 2
United Nations, New York

2023 marks the mid-point in the fifteen-year run toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 with a target date of 2030. In addition to the July session of the HLPF, a special SDG Summit of heads of state and of government, in September 2023, will take a hard look at the global drive for the Goals, reviewing successes and failures and redirecting efforts accordingly.

The Parliamentary Forum at the HLPF will take stock of the role of parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs over the past few years and in accelerating action in the years ahead. In three short segments, the meeting will highlight the critical need for parliaments to invest considerably more in their own institutional processes, present practical illustrations of parliamentary action, and propose innovative solutions to unlock sustainable development.

Programme

10:00 Opening

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU

10:10 Parliaments and the SDGs: the institutional challenge

On a global scale, the SDGs as a whole have fallen dangerously behind. Only part of the SDGs implementation gap can be attributed to sudden events such as the Covid pandemic or, more recently, the war in Ukraine. Deep down, the SDGs have fallen victim to political neglect, poor planning, incoherent policy prescriptions, and institutional constraints at all levels of government.

While governments must lead on the SDGs, parliaments have a critical role to play with their lawmaking, oversight, budget and representative functions. The United Nations General Assembly recognized this

again in December 2022, when it adopted a resolution entitled *Enhancing the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

But how effective have parliaments been helping implement the SDGs thus far and what obstacles are they facing on the road ahead? As IPU's field work and analysis show, parliamentary engagement in the SDGs leaves much to be desired. Despite some stellar examples of parliamentary activism, political buy-in is generally weak and important institutional challenges remain. In many parliaments, the SDGs continue to be perceived as a "foreign" agenda that has little to do with domestic priorities. Capacities for oversight and legislation are limited or under-utilized, laws and budgets are not in sync with national development plans, women, youth and vulnerable groups are under-represented, and individual SDGs are still dealt with in silos.

On the more positive side, parliaments that have proper SDGs coordination structures (committees or caucuses) are doing better in their legislative and oversight roles even though, generally, such structure are lacking in authority and resources. A number of parliaments are working pro-actively monitoring the SDG implementation domestically and working across borders with other parliaments to share best practices. Overall, parliamentary engagement in the government-led Voluntary National Reviews remains weak, though a growing number of parliaments are providing to input into the reviews.

This segment of the Forum will assess the main obstacles and opportunities for parliaments to better institutionalize and mainstream the SDGs in their work.

- In what ways can parliaments effectively address the stumbling blocks to the implementation of the SDGs?
- What are some of the best practices to deepen parliamentary oversight of government action for the SDGs?

Presenters:

Ms. Susanne Menge, MP, Bundestag, Germany

Mr. Emanuele Speranza, Regional Advisor for Inclusive Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNDP

Moderator:

Ms. Paddy Torsney, Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations

11:20 SDG 6: an illustration of parliamentary action

SDG 6, on water and sanitation, is one of a goals under review at this year's HLPF. Water and sanitation are vital to people and the planet; they are also an essential pre-condition to bringing the entire integrated framework of the SDGs to fruition.

This year's Parliamentary Hearing at the UN was dedicated to water and sanitation in view of the UN Water Conference on 22-24 March, in New York. Having exposed low levels of commitment to SDG 6 in countries around the world, the Hearing concluded with a series of recommendations to boost action for water and sanitation that will require parliaments to rethink their priorities as well as their institutional set up.

Continuing from the previous segment, this part of the Forum will look at concrete illustrations of the ways and means by which parliaments can advance SDG 6.

- What are the main actions parliaments need to take to advance SDG 6 as part of the integrated SDG framework?
- What stands in the way of parliamentary action for SDG 6?

Presenter:

Mr. David McGuinty, MP, House of Commons, Canada

11:50 Beyond GDP: measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet

No country today has really managed to decouple economic activity from the environment. Globally, production and consumption levels are unsustainable as well as inequitable, as the lion's share of natural resources are consumed by a minority of the population. Yet, as the UN Secretary-General writes, "economic models continue to assume endless expansion and growth and overlook the broader systems that sustain life and well-being."¹

Indeed, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains a leading indicator of progress despite its many accounting and conceptual flaws. For example, GDP does not account for the care economy that (mostly) women inhabit; on the other hand, it counts military spending or environmental cleanup costs as positive contributors to progress. More important, governments' attachment to GDP as a driver of economic policy comes at the expense of economic models such as the circular economy, the solidarity economy and some others which contribute greatly to human well-being and environmental sustainability at lower levels of production and consumption.

The very last target of the SDGs (17.19) calls on governments to consider adopting alternative measures of progress as a way of grounding all SDG policies on the real needs of people. A number of alternatives to GDP already exist (e.g. the Multidimensional Poverty Index, the Ecological Footprint, the Gini Coefficient, and the Happiness Index) which could be adopted immediately while other metrics are being developed.

This final segment of the Forum will consider possible paths toward a less growth-centric sustainable development through alternative metrics of progress.

- In what ways alternative growth models help meet the needs of people?
- What is the relationship between economic growth and sustainable development and can less growth-centric models help deliver the SDGs?
- How can parliaments help ensure that new metrics of progress drive sustainable development policies in all sectors and at all levels?

Presenters:

Mr. Petros Kokkalis, Member of the European Parliament, Greece

¹ *Our Common Agenda*, Report of the Secretary-General, page 34

Ms. Chantal Line Carpentier, Head, Trade, Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainable Development, UNCTAD

Moderator:

Mr. Alessandro Motter, Senior Advisor, Economic and Social Affairs, IPU

12:55 **Closing**

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU