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Regional Seminar for Parliaments of the Caribbean

Accelerating parliamentary action on climate change for a resilient and sustainable region

27–29 May 2024, Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago)

SUMMARY REPORT

More than 50 participants from Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Cayman Islands, gathered in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago from 27 to 29 May 2024 for the Regional Seminar for Parliaments of the Caribbean. The seminar was jointly organized by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The three-day seminar focused on climate change which is seen as one of the most pressing issues in the Caribbean region.

The state of climate change impacts in the Caribbean, and making loss and damage and climate finance a reality to support the achievement of climate and sustainable development goals

The Caribbean region is one of the most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change. In this session, experts described the severe consequences of climate change in the region, including sea-level rise, increased flooding, more frequent and intense storms and hurricanes, and coastal erosion. The largely coastal population of the Caribbean countries further heightens the risk of detrimental climate impacts.

Despite regional progress on implementing the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change impacts are increasing in severity in many parts of the region, hindering the achievement of sustainable development. As the Caribbean countries contribute very little globally to greenhouse gas emissions, yet face extreme consequences, parliamentarians expressed the need to urgently scale-up and increase the accessibility of climate finance for countries on the frontlines of climate change.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Advocate for the reform of global finance, including through the Bridgetown Initiatives 2.0¹ () /and 3.0,² to ensure climate funding is available to vulnerable countries that are historically low carbon emitters; and support national and international initiatives for the acceleration of the transfer of Loss and Damage funds.
- Call for a greater role of parliaments in global level dialogues and processes on climate change, including through the IPU and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and ensure the priorities of small island developing States (SIDS), including those in the Caribbean, are included.

¹ <https://pmo.gov.bb/bridgetown2-0-2pager-3/>

² <https://www.bridgetown-initiative.org/>.

- Ensure strong national structures and processes are in place to receive international climate financing, and develop clear plans for the effective and transparent use of funds to meet the most urgent climate priorities.
- Develop or support mechanisms to quantify economic and non-economic losses due to climate change; promote discussions to plan ahead of time.
- Promote regional cooperation on climate change to develop complementary approaches to climate action, and support knowledge-sharing on regional priorities including resilience-building of the tourism, agriculture and energy sectors, and climate-resilient infrastructure. The creation of data sharing initiatives, regional disaster centres and water sharing within the region were also proffered.
- Make use of existing parliamentary powers and prerogatives for enhanced involvement in discussions and decisions related to climate finance, and enhanced transparency and accountability of government action.
- Innovate and consider looking at new approaches and initiatives to facilitate enhanced parliamentary involvement, including by strengthening cooperation with other State institutions, such as the supreme audit institutions (SAIs), or looking at ways to mainstream climate change considerations throughout parliamentary work (budgets, scrutiny, outreach, etc.).
- Implement capacity building initiatives to raise awareness of parliamentarians and enhance their knowledge to effectively implement climate and SDG-related goals.

People on the move: Addressing climate-induced migration and displacement

This session focused on the growing concern regarding migration and displacement linked to climate change across the Caribbean countries. Experts described how an increase in climate change impacts spurred displacement both within countries but also across borders. Parliamentarians discussed the impacts that such population movements had on livelihood security, education and health, both for the displaced populations as well as host communities. The importance of ensuring the protection and respect of the rights of persons displaced by climate change, particularly for groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations, was highlighted.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Discuss and implement measures and mechanisms to manage and mitigate the impact of climate related displacements; set up systems and processes in advance to be able to deal with such situations when they occur. Preparedness is key to limit the impact of such displacements.
- Adopt legislation to ensure the continuation of essential services including health and education for people displaced by climate change both within and across borders, paying particular attention to challenges faced by groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations, who may already be facing discrimination and difficulty of access.
- Promote regional cooperation mechanisms, including through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), to provide humanitarian assistance after climate-related disasters and facilitate the easy movement of people affected by climate-related disasters to other countries in the region.
- Engage groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations in parliamentary work through regular consultations and outreach initiatives; support the development of research and data to better understand challenges faced by such groups and priorities.
- Raise awareness of and promote discussions on the challenges faced by internally displaced persons as they tend to be underestimated or not considered.

Use of statistical data and scientific evidence to inform climate change decisions

This session underscored the importance of statistical data in climate change decision-making. Experts emphasized the critical need for timely and accurate data on climate-related impacts, including temperatures, precipitation patterns, flooding, drought and storms in order to better prepare for climate-related hazards. Parliamentarians described the challenges they faced in accessing comprehensive, reliable climate data and capacity limitations in analysing data.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Advocate for access to data in a timely, efficient, reliable manner to inform and guide budgetary decisions and parliamentary work.
- Pro-actively invest in the collection and analysis of climate-related data; provide budgetary support to national statistical agencies to that effect.
- Encourage a coordinated approach for climate data collection across relevant national agencies and ensure data is stored in a central national repository that is accessible to a wide range of stakeholders.
- Encourage partnerships with universities to support accurate data collection, and also reflect on ways to engage and secure partnerships with private companies that own and collect data.
- Seek opportunities to build capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to interpret and analyse climate data to better inform decision-making.
- Support data transparency and avoid the politicization of climate data; make sure that sources of information do not provide data that is biased by their source of funding.
- Facilitate the sharing of national climate data across countries in the region to promote knowledge-sharing on climate impacts and climate-related disasters.

Ensuring health for all across the Caribbean in the face of climate change

The inextricable linkages between climate change and health were the key topics discussed in this session. Health experts, including medical doctors, described the growing impact of climate change on human health in the region, such as the increasing incidence of disease following extreme weather events. They also described the growing challenges resulting from climate change and climate-related disasters that people faced in accessing healthcare facilities, such as physical, social and economic barriers. Parliamentarians exchanged views on priority areas for strengthening health legislation to ensure equitable access to quality health services even in the face of climate change.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Stop working in silos and make sure that gaps related to climate adaptation and health are addressed in a transversal manner.
- Mainstream maternal, newborn and adolescents' health in climate policies and budgets; encourage inclusive consultations to make sure that the needs and specificities of elders and people with disabilities are equally taken into consideration.
- Invest in climate-resilient healthcare infrastructure; ensure they have backup power, water supply systems and other relevant facilities that can withstand extreme weather and other climate-related hazards.
- Support research to better understand the links between climate change and health impacts, including on mental health.

Climate change and technology: The potential of artificial intelligence to tackle the climate crisis

The potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and other new technologies for addressing the climate crisis were debated in this session. Global and regional experts on AI presented the opportunities that AI could provide in the fight against climate change, for example by improving weather pattern predictions and processing large amounts of climate data. Nevertheless, concerns around AI were also raised in the session, including the possibility that AI could further create a digital divide among developed and developing countries, and that expanding AI systems would require increasing amounts of energy which would put additional pressure on the climate. The risks of disinformation linked to AI, though less present in the area of AI and climate change, were also raised. Parliamentarians expressed the urgent need for AI to be responsible and inclusive, which could be supported through new legislation.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Explore ways of supporting a responsible use of AI for enhanced monitoring of climate impacts, better planning and strategic investments.
- Consider supporting the development of tech centres at the national level and enhanced coordination at the regional level.

- Discuss safeguards to be developed (including possible regulation) to ensure use of quality data and of valid/traceable data sources.
- Support the development of AI skills development programmes and the creation of specialized units on AI and climate change within the government and parliament.
- Develop the capacity of parliaments to manage the use of AI in parliaments/by parliaments.
- Support the establishment of a regional hub, within the framework of the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament, to facilitate regional support between parliaments on the use of AI.

Opportunities for knowledge-sharing and innovation on climate solutions among islands – embracing island leadership *and* Climate tools spotlight: Strengthening legislation and oversight for effective climate action

The sessions looked at practical solutions and guidance for parliamentarians to address the climate crisis. Participants were informed about ongoing climate initiatives specifically designed for island countries. Parliamentarians had the opportunity to engage with the [Blue Planet Alliance](#) which seeks to get island countries around the world to legislatively mandate a commitment to 100% renewable energy by 2045. Capacity-building opportunities on climate action for parliamentarians from island countries, namely through the Blue Planet Alliance Fellowship, were also showcased.

Parliamentarians were also given an introduction to a leading climate tool, the [Climate Change Laws of the World](#) database, hosted by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics. The database, in which the IPU is a partner, provides parliaments with a comprehensive collection of climate laws from countries around the world which can support the drafting and revision of their own national climate laws.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Consider opportunities to benefit from initiatives such as the Blue Planet Alliance.
- Identify capacity-building needs and consider reaching out to national, regional and global development partners, including the IPU, to address them.
- Disseminate existing tools in support of parliaments within your respective parliament.
- Consider engagement in the IPU [Parliaments for the Planet](#) campaign, including implementing steps to transform parliaments into green institutions.

Building a climate-resilient and prosperous Caribbean: Boosting adaptation efforts and ensuring livelihood security

Building on the insights from the previous days, the final session provided the opportunity for parliamentarians to exchange deeper insights on the key actions they must take to promote a prosperous and climate-resilient Caribbean region. They exchanged views with experts and civil society representatives, and identified priority areas for action in the region, such as promoting livelihood security for coastal populations, strengthening disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and ensuring economic activities can withstand the impacts of climate change and climate-related disasters. Emphasis was made on the need to invest both in mitigation and adaptation efforts. Making use of local experience and knowledge was also stressed.

Key parliamentary actions identified include:

- Ensure that the adaptation lens is integrated in national strategies, development policies and legislation.
- Enhance internal and external collaborations to ensure that actions to boost adaptation efforts can be implemented in an effective and comprehensive way.
- Enhance oversight actions, follow up on government's policies and programmes through motions, questions to ministers, etc.
- Engage in awareness raising initiatives at community level.
- Ensure that more funds are allocated for climate resilient development and nature-based solutions.

Concluding recommendations

- Brace for impact – climate change is real and we cannot avoid it. Prevention and preparedness are key for any sustainable future.
- Become a climate champion in your parliament.
- Make use of parliamentary powers to their full potential to accelerate parliamentary action for climate change.
- Lead by example, including as a region.
- Keep in contact to build regional parliamentary experience, solidarity and power.
- Change is possible if there is the will to do so.