



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Parliamentary Forum at the 2026 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development *The SDGs at a critical juncture: Taking stock of implementation, turbocharging action, and envisioning the future of sustainable development*

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United Nations, New York

Summary report

Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Forum at the 2026 United Nations (UN) High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) provided an opportunity to assess progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), hear from experts, share best practices and discuss the future of sustainable development. The three-hour meeting focused on SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, one of five goals under review at the HLPF.
2. Some 60 parliamentarians from 21 countries and the European Parliament, as well as representatives of regional parliamentary assemblies and organizations were in attendance, along with government representatives and members of civil society for a total of about 150 participants.

Opening session

3. **Dr. Tulia Ackson**, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), pointed out that while there had been some progress, the SDGs were largely off track because of weak institutional development, bad politics and low investments. The IPU had long placed the SDGs at the centre of its work with parliaments in cooperation with the UN. A 2022 General Assembly resolution enhanced parliaments' role in accelerating the SDGs, as did a statement on parliaments' accountability in the 2023 Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.
4. Dr. Ackson reminded participants that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) had been laid down 11 years ago following acknowledgment that billions of people were being deprived of essential needs, that

injustice was entrenched and that planetary boundaries were being trampled. Presently, however, there was stagnation and even cuts in welfare, public investments and aid budgets; military expenditures were at a record high; the number of conflicts was unprecedented; power and money were concentrated in fewer hands; and public trust in governments and global institutions were at an all-time low. With four years left to meet the 2030 Agenda, it was not too late to improve people's lives by accumulating effects to make meaningful gains. Dr. Ackson encouraged parliamentarians to embrace their responsibility as legislators, opinion makers and thought leaders to instill hope and accelerate the SDGs.

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

5. Up to three billion people cannot afford adequate housing and more than one billion live in slums and informal settlements, according to a 2025 UN SDG report. UN Habitat's 2026 report on SDG 11 warns about the precarious housing situation, particularly in the Global South. About 300 million people worldwide are homeless; and more than 120 million are displaced due to conflict and the climate crisis. While access to public transportation has improved, 4 in 10 urban residents lack convenient access to it, and in some areas, workers travel far distances daily, and women and girls feel unsafe. In 20 years, 70% of society will be urbanized, but urban sprawl has negative impacts on the natural environment, including droughts, fires, biodiversity and food security.
6. To achieve SDG 11, urban policies must be inclusive, resilient and sustainable. They should guarantee access to affordable housing and basic services such as clean and safe water and sanitation, efficient public transport and access to green spaces. Through legislation, budgets and regulatory frameworks, parliamentarians should insist on energy-efficient housing, low-emission public transport and climate-resilient infrastructure that can withstand heatwaves, floods and other shocks. Parliaments can also address the health hazards of urban pollution, including methane from landfills and greenhouse gas emissions. They must also ensure water and other essential services are prioritized in legislation and budgeting.

Recommendations for parliamentarians for building safe, resilient and inclusive communities:

- (a) Ensure urban frameworks and policies consider factors such as land access, population density, refugee flows and the climate crisis.
- (b) Align urban policy with climate action; more than 80% of national climate reports recognize the critical importance of urban action.
- (c) Strengthen local governments' capacity and political autonomy so they can better access financing, generate revenues and make decisions about their territories.
- (d) Implement legislation requiring environmentally friendly, resilient and smart industrial zones.

- (e) In addition to affordable housing, prioritize water and sanitation services, waste management and public transport.
 - i. Follow the lead of the world's most livable cities by refusing to privatize these services and instead invest in them.
 - ii. Recognize waste and water management as valuable resources that can reduce emissions, build climate resilience and create economic opportunities.
- (f) Strengthen affordable housing oversight and require annual reporting on affordability, performance and public participation.
- (g) Ensure informal settlements receive proper services.
- (h) Institutionalize public participation and participatory budgeting by:
 - i. Including women, youth, informal workers, caregivers and residents of informal settlements;
 - ii. Regularly engaging with – and consider paying – caregivers and grassroots workers, who often use innovative community solutions but have limited opportunity to give feedback to elected officials, particularly in rural areas;
 - iii. Making decisions based on community priorities.
- (i) Ensure cities are inclusive and resilient for all by prioritizing vulnerable groups.
- (j) Offer financial incentives such as tax breaks, subsidies, vouchers and low-interest rates to expand access to green infrastructure, electric vehicles and solar panels.
- (k) When appropriate, consider public-private partnerships to build infrastructure and find innovative solutions for inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities.
- (l) Advocate for a whole-of-society approach, which includes civil society, the private sector and the academia.
- (m) Push the financial sector and artificial intelligence (AI) developers to promote the SDGs and ensure innovation benefits everyone.
- (n) Integrate services across government agencies and between urban and rural areas – problems with waste management, erosion, droughts and flooding go beyond city borders.
- (o) Stay updated and engage with ongoing efforts around these issues, including work by the UN-Habitat Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All, and the 2026 Baku call to action on safe and resilient cities and communities.

SDGs implementation: Lessons learned and the future of sustainable development

7. While many SDGs are lagging, the landmark UN Pact for the Future aims to turbocharge them and designates the 2027 SDG Summit as a time to reflect on the post-2030 Agenda era. Parliaments should take stock of failures and successes in implementing the SDGs to guide future frameworks and hold their governments accountable.
8. SDG implementation is often fragmented, and success is not possible if half the population is denied their fundamental rights. Girls' and women's rights and gender equality must be prioritized as they are pre-conditions for economic growth, stronger institutions and lasting peace. Human rights cannot be separated from sustainable

development; countries can't claim progress while imprisoning journalists, silencing civil society and excluding people from political participation. Democracy is not just one goal; all goals depend on having strong democratic institutions. Security, climate policy and development cannot be treated separately, but should be addressed holistically in future frameworks. Technological progress must be done responsibly so AI and other tools are not biased but inclusive, accessible and grounded in human rights.

9. Future frameworks must acknowledge the world is in a different place today than when the SDGs were adopted in 2015. Geopolitical tensions have increased, conflicts have proliferated, climate breakdown has accelerated, inequality has worsened and the debt crisis has escalated. Attention should be paid to how progress is measured as this currently does not consider factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic inequality, conflict, higher interest rates and lack of climate mitigation. A panelist suggested measuring progress with net positions by country and development type that would reflect any regressions, such as conflict and inequality. Efforts are underway at the UN to develop indicators beyond the gross domestic product (GDP), which does not reflect critical data about informal economies and inequality, nor does it paint an accurate picture about people's quality of life.

Recommendations for parliamentarians for accelerating progress toward the SDGs and beyond:

- (a) Focus on strengthening democracy and democratic institutions; without these progress will not be possible.
- (b) Address security, climate policy and development jointly as they reinforce each other and thus cannot be treated separately.
- (c) Eliminate discriminatory laws, as this can be a powerful catalyst for removing barriers and boosting participation in education, public life and employment.
- (d) Prioritize girls' and women's rights and gender equality; if half the population is left out, progress will stall.
- (e) Use legislative, oversight and accountability tools to tackle illicit financial flows and tax evasion, which cost billions each year and could instead fund sustainable development.
- (f) Bridge the gap between local and national policies; people are more likely to support sustainable development efforts when they see tangible results in their communities.
- (g) Prioritize oversight and accountability to track sustainable development progress; monitor results; communicate with the public; and ensure governments deliver on their promises.
- (h) Form parliamentary commissions, working groups and committees to institutionalize goals and embed them into national plans.
- (i) Focus on genuine cooperation instead of transactional relationships; today's challenges can only be solved through multilateralism and international cooperation.

- (j) Confront the growing public trust crisis by regularly and meaningfully engaging with citizens and ensuring they have ownership of all agendas, and facilitate convenings across all levels.
- (k) Insist on responsible technological progress to ensure AI and other tools are inclusive, accessible and respect human rights.
- (l) Pressure the executive branch to work towards elimination of nuclear weapons as a legal obligation under international treaties; nuclear weapons pose an existential threat and without peace and security progress will be curtailed.

Closing session

10. **Ms. Anda Filip**, Secretary General of the IPU, stated that every country could advance the SDGs by mobilizing political will and bridging divides. Any action was better than no action and would allow for better positioning for whatever came after 2030. Discussions about a post-2030 development agenda would take place at the SDG Summit in September 2027. It was clear that greening the economy was not enough. Progress needed to be redefined in terms that were less materialistic and more human-centered, which was why the IPU had long advocated the development of development indicators beyond the GDP.
11. The success of the development agenda was about social justice as much as environmental sustainability and was also key to survival of the multilateral system, Ms. Filip added. The IPU's 2027-2031 strategic plan aimed to empower parliaments as key institutions for democracy; recognized that democratic backsliding impeded progress; prioritized building strong and inclusive parliaments; and aimed to facilitate parliamentary diplomacy, dialogue and joint action. The IPU would build on its work on climate change; democracy and human rights; gender equality and youth participation; peace and security; and sustainable development for all, with AI as a cross-cutting issue.
12. Ms. Filip encouraged parliamentarians to check their government's SDG strategy with an eye to refocusing them on the remaining four years before the 2030 deadline. An IPU survey of parliaments in 36 countries that were submitting voluntary national reviews had shown that most parliaments were not as involved as they should be. Ms. Filip reminded participants to continue working closely with the IPU, which would continue advocating for parliaments to deeply engage in finding solutions for today's global challenges.

List of speakers

Opening session

- Dr. Tulia Ackson, President of the IPU

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Moderator:

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

Presenters:

- Ms. Annaclaudia Roszbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat
- Ms. Violet Shivutse, Global Governing Council Chair, Huairou Commission

Session II: SDG Implementation: Lessons learned and the future of sustainable development

Moderator:

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

Presenters:

- Ms. Abir Al-Sahlani, MEP, Vice-Chair, Committee on Development, European Parliament
- Ms. Marina Ponti, Global Director, UN SDG Action Campaign (via video)
- Ms. Barbara Adams, Senior Policy Advisor, Global Policy Forum

Closing session

- Ms. Anda Filip, Secretary General of the IPU