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## **Webinar: Building back better: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance the role of parliaments in disaster risk reduction**

**9 July 2020, 2–3.15 p.m. CEST**

### **REPORT**

#### **Speakers**

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, Honorary IPU President; Member of Parliament, Bangladesh.  
Dr. Richard John Brennan, Regional Emergency Director, Eastern Mediterranean  
Regional Office, World Health Organization (WHO).  
Ms. Bernadette Wuyatta Songa, Member of Parliament, Sierra Leone.  
Mr. Andries Gryffroy, Senator, Belgium.  
Ms. Ana Belén Marin, Member of Parliament, Ecuador.  
Ms. Paola Albritto (moderator), Branch Chief, Intergovernmental Processes,  
Interagency Cooperation and Partnerships, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction  
(UNDRR).

#### **Introduction**

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), UNDRR and WHO jointly organized a series of webinars for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. The first webinar had been about COVID-19 preparedness and response. This webinar came from a parliamentary perspective and presented various countries' experiences of managing the pandemic. The event explored the implications of developing and implementing disaster risk reduction strategies designed to build back better by engaging beyond the health sector. It was an opportunity for peer learning in which parliaments and parliamentarians could engage more fully so as to strengthen risk governance.

The webinar on 9 July was attended by around 240 participants from 72 countries, including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and disaster risk reduction practitioners.

Following welcome remarks by a WHO representative, parliamentary perspectives were presented from Bangladesh, Belgium, Ecuador and Sierra Leone. The questions received before and during the webinar were answered by text chat or live video link.

#### **All-hazard policy and legislation**

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction aims to prevent new disaster risks and reduce existing ones. The Framework specifically encourages parliamentarians to develop new or amend relevant current legislation to support the implementation of disaster risk reduction. The WHO Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework and the WHO Multisectoral Preparedness Coordination Framework also emphasize the need for an all-hazard risk management approach across government, and throughout all sectors and levels of society.

However, the webinar highlighted that parliaments have not been making full use of their powers to hold governments accountable in this area. It was also pointed out

that, although international instruments such as the Sendai Framework focused on risk, national legislation often remained centred on disaster management. A mindset shift is required so that the basis of prevention and preparedness becomes risk governance. Parliaments have a key role to play in ensuring that policies and laws are aligned with international commitments and cover all hazards, including biological risks.

### **Investing across sectors to build back better**

The COVID-19 pandemic is having far reaching economic and social consequences. Given the financing decisions that need to be made, the webinar called for smart investments that assess the benefits of action and the costs of inaction in different sectors.

Knowledge in areas such as education, science and innovation are strategically important for the future of our societies and must therefore be prioritized. These areas are also important to guarantee sustainability and address climate change challenges.

The question was raised of how to invest in climate change during the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic. Webinar participants stressed that existing processes, such as the European Green Deal, remained relevant. Countries' economic recovery measures must take account of climate considerations. However, the private sector was also responsible for addressing ecological challenges and ensuring we build back better.

### **From global to local**

As representatives of the people, parliamentarians are instrumental in engaging communities and local actors to improve the understanding and implementation of disaster risk reduction policies. Community participation also allows vulnerable groups to be identified and specific local risks targeted.

Community engagement should encompass economic, social and institutional factors. A country's risk factors can include conditions such as poverty and malnutrition. These can increase the impact of disasters and affect the types of structures needed for risk governance and disaster management.

### **Good governance**

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked new debates, including on how to invest in health and the green economy. It will be important that such debates have a democratic basis and that parliaments remain a central institution in what is now considered the "new normal" shaped by COVID-19.

The webinar further highlighted persistent governance challenges, such as corruption, which need to be addressed so that funds can be used effectively in the COVID-19 response and recovery phases.

Parliaments have a key role in institutionalizing lessons learned. They can strengthen country systems for managing all types of emergency (including pandemics) and for better integrating biological hazards into national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction.