



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

No.1

# SDG 1 and the UN definition of poverty

UN processes – A briefing for MPs

**Date:** Tuesday, 20 October 2020, 9–10 a.m. (New York)  
**Invited:** Members of Parliament following development and economic issues  
**Languages:** English and French  
**Registration:** Through IPU group secretaries or email to [ny-office@ipu.org](mailto:ny-office@ipu.org)

*How many people around the world live in extreme poverty, unable to enjoy basic human rights?*

Using the World Bank's International Poverty Line of \$1.90 per day:

- some 700 million people, or 10 per cent of the world's population, are poor today, and
- a billion people have been lifted out of poverty since 1990, when the poverty rate stood at 36 per cent.

The 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals were designed to tackle the dual challenge of poverty eradication and environmental preservation. SDG 1 is *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*. While recognizing various dimensions of poverty, it essentially adopts the standard of \$1.90 per day.

*The international community should stop hiding behind an international poverty line that uses a standard of miserable subsistence. The UN should have the courage of its convictions and acknowledge that the scale of global poverty is far more accurately reflected in its own indicators and reporting.*

– Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur

In his last report as UN Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights—*The parlous state of poverty eradication* (July 2020)—Professor Philip Alston makes the case for adopting a stronger definition of poverty. He notes that a yardstick of \$5.50 per day more accurately captures the real condition of poverty, where some 3.4 billion, or 46 per cent of the world's population, were poor in 2015. The UNDP's multidimensional poverty index has the global poverty rate at about 23 per cent—more than double the 10 per cent estimate. As Alston observes, these much higher poverty baselines make it virtually impossible to eradicate poverty by 2030. The “triumphalist” narrative of the international community—that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty was going steadily down—is not supported by the facts. The Alston report poses tremendous challenges to the United Nations, governments and parliaments alike, and calls for a much deeper set of policy reforms than currently proposed.

This first briefing for parliamentarians on United Nations processes will offer an opportunity for parliamentarians to learn more about the Organization's definition of poverty and its implications for poverty eradication by 2030.

## Leading questions

*Should the UN adopt a more realistic official definition of extreme poverty to assess progress on SDG 1?*  
*Are UN prescriptions for eradicating global poverty commensurate to the task?*

## Featuring

Prof. **Philip Alston**, former UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights  
Dr. **George Gray Molina**, Head of Strategic Engagement and Chief Economist, UNDP  
Ms. **Barbara Adams**, President, Global Policy Forum

## Q&A

**Parliamentarians**