



## INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

### **Second Committee Agenda item 55 Sustainable development: Protection of global climate (d); promotion of new and renewable energies (i)**

**United Nations, 2 November 2009**

#### **STATEMENT by Alessandro Motter, Liaison Officer**

Chairperson,

Nobody today can guess the outcome of the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP15) in Copenhagen, a few weeks hence, where a post-Kyoto deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions is expected. But whether there is a deal or not, and whether the deal is truly effective or falls short of the targets recommended by the IPCC, one thing is certain: at the end of the day, as we were reminded at a recent thematic panel in this room, what matters is the *actual, ascertainable* emission cuts that countries will have to implement on the ground. And that will depend in large part on the strength of legal and fiscal reforms in which parliaments must also play a role.

This is not just a debate between economists and scientists. It is at bottom a question of politics and of how parliaments and their members can best reconcile the competing demands of their constituents. The simple truth of the matter is that people are still divided between those who appreciate the dangers of climate change and want to do something about it, at whatever cost; and those who worry more about the bottom line and the short-term cost of doing something. How quickly they forgot the lesson of the Stern Report, that the long-term cost of inaction will far outweigh the cost of action today.

Parliaments, as the expression of the people, have a lot of work to do in bridging this political divide. They will need to help devise solutions that provide a win-win scenario for both rich and poor, labor and industry, developed and developing. We should rejoice at the fact that several parliaments have been supportive of strong CO<sub>2</sub> reduction commitments, often with interim targets; but we also know of several parliaments where such agreements remain very contentious.

To help transcend political differences and to mobilize parliaments around this most critical issue - for development, and for humanity as a whole - the IPU organized a major debate at this spring's 120<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Addis Ababa. Out of that debate a resolution emerged on "*climate change, sustainable development models and renewable energies*" which shows considerable consensus on several policy approaches. The full version of this sweeping text is available to you as part of the documentation kit for this meeting. I would like however to highlight some of the arguments that run through it.

The first argument is simply this: there is a lot that can be done already to address climate change by simply going for the so-called "low hanging fruit" first, that is, those things that are cost effective and where there is already considerable public support. This includes achieving greater energy efficiencies and conservation by re-thinking things like the urban landscape to facilitate public transit, home building codes to induce retrofitting, school

curriculums to educate people from a young age about the environment, agricultural methods to apply universally things like organic farming, and even population policies to reduce fertility rates and so keep future consumption levels in check. Many of these solutions are already available to all countries, including developing ones, but remain vastly underutilized.

The resolution also recognizes that a shift toward renewable energies and away from fossil fuels is key to help stem climate change. This shift however will not come purely as the result of market forces but will require active government intervention. Renewable sources like wind power, biomass, photovoltaic and solar energy, geothermal and hydro power, are gaining ground the most in those countries where there is a supportive legislative and fiscal framework. This is important, among other things, to make sure that price signals are right for *all* energy sources. Direct and indirect subsidies to fossil fuels will have to go wherever they exist; indeed, higher taxes on fossil fuels may even be required to account for their inherent environmental costs.

The resolution also acknowledges that the transition to renewable energies will depend on more investments, both by private industry and the government, in research and development of new technologies. This will help further lower the cost of renewables and so make them more competitive against traditional sources of energies. Developed countries in particular must take the lead and invest massively in R&D at the same time as they must facilitate technology transfers to developing countries.

In another important message, the parliamentarians who met in Addis Ababa made it clear that nuclear energy is not to be considered a renewable energy both because uranium is a finite resource and because of the potential human and environmental costs associated with it. This is a warning to all those who think that the easy way out to achieve future emission cuts is to go nuclear. Similarly, our resolution cautions against the overreliance on biofuels when their production sacrifice arable land and compromise food security.

Chairperson,

Many people believe that the current global economic and financial crisis will make it even more difficult for governments and the private sector to absorb the costs of a transition to a green economy. But nothing could be further from the truth. The crisis should actually be a catalyst to move us forward in the right direction, with more stimulus investment in green solutions which are a clear win-win for all concerned: with more jobs, high growth and ultimately a more sustainable environment. We will explore this angle in a frank discussion with parliamentarians and UN officials in the course of the upcoming UN-IPU Parliamentary Hearing on 19-20 November.

The IPU will also be present at the COP15 with a meeting of parliamentarians hosted by the Danish parliament. The meeting will afford an opportunity for MPs from around the world to feel the pulse of the negotiations and thus go back home with a renewed sense of commitment and responsibility to their constituents and indeed to the people of the entire world.

Thank you.