



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

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## **Interactive dialogue on Harmony with Nature**

### **United Nations**

#### **Statement by Miguel Bermeo Permanent Observer**

Distinguished delegates,

It was a pleasure to hear so many insightful presentations on how we need to change the relationship between human beings and nature, on this day, Earth Day.

Indeed, the question of harmony with nature is a most fundamental one that challenges all of us to look at the whole development paradigm from a different perspective. Without a doubt, it should inform much of the debates that are now taking place at the UN on the post-2015 development agenda and on the future Sustainable Development Goals.

Just recently, at the 128<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the IPU in Quito, our members held a debate on the need to reconcile economic growth with human well-being. Many of the points made at that meeting come very close to the issues that were flagged in this discussion today. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to read the official summary of the meeting, known as the Quito Communique, which is available in the back of the room but also online at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/128/quito-comm.htm>

As the Communique says, in a finite world, the perennial cycle of increasing consumption and production that is at the heart of the current economic model is no longer sustainable. Growth alone is not the answer to the social, economic and environmental challenges of our time; in fact it is becoming part of the problem. A different approach that focuses on well-being in all its dimensions is required if we are to evolve as a global community able to fulfil core human values of peace, solidarity and harmony with nature.

While growth is a necessary condition for development, and indeed has helped countless generations climb out of poverty, more attention now needs to be paid to the nature of growth and to the distribution of its benefits. Strong growth does not necessarily lead to increased human development and happiness. Conversely, with the right social policy balance it is possible to improve overall well-being even at low levels of economic growth. In developing countries, material growth is essential if we are to eradicate extreme poverty and provide everyone with the necessities of life. Here too, environmental and social sustainability must be part of economic policy from the very start.

Ultimately, well-being consists of human factors that do not necessarily depend on unrestrained material consumption and production. Education, health, culture, leisure time, the practice of religion, the enjoyment of all human rights, emotional fulfilment, as well as a sense of belonging to a community, are all dimensions of human happiness that can be advanced at little cost to the environment and with huge social dividends. Supporting more of these goods should be another focus of a new model of growth and development – one that in fact will help us all live more in harmony with nature.

As a number of countries at various levels of development have shown, it is possible today for all governments to adopt measurements to help better target economic, social and environmental policies for human welfare. Measuring national well-being beyond mere GDP will be critical in redefining growth, not only in terms of material production and consumption, but also in terms of social and environmental progress.

Well-being policies will need to strive for a better balance between private interests and the common good, between competition and cooperation, and between private and public investments to produce goods that all can enjoy and that the planet can afford to support. In short, the pursuit of well-being as the ultimate purpose of development, and of human progress, will require a new social contract premised on a vision of the planet and of people as assets to be nurtured.

Thank you very much, and again congratulations on your excellent contribution to our understanding of these issues.