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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(f) Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

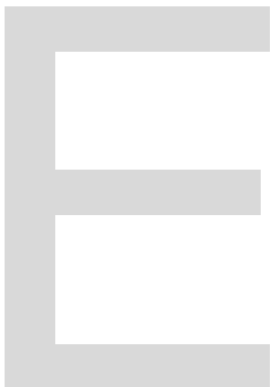
New York, 13–14 February 2017

The Hearing was designed to contribute to the UN Ocean Conference in June this year and was entitled *A World of Blue: Preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet, ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda*. It formed part of the extensive series of events and initiatives that the IPU is undertaking to advance the SDGs.

Oceans are the main subject of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*). Goal 14 acknowledges that oceans will soon reach the limit of their capacity to regenerate themselves and to play a key role in supporting the entire earth's ecosystem.

In line with past practice, the event was organized by the IPU in partnership with the Office of the President of the General Assembly. The President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Peter Tomson, attended with the President and the Secretary General of the IPU and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, who was on mission abroad).

Of the 170 parliamentarians participating, two thirds had never attended this flagship IPU event. This points to the high degree of interest that parliamentarians have in oceans. A total of 300 people took part, including diplomats, UN staff, civil society representatives and parliamentary staff.



#IPU136

There were four main sessions during the Hearing that covered the most important aspects of the issue: the economic benefits of oceans, the need to protect marine life, interconnections with climate change, and governance of the high seas. Overall, the Hearing helped to raise awareness of SDG 14 among parliamentarians and to highlight key actions they can take to protect such a vital ecosystem, including:

- Preventing all kinds of waste from going to the sea, which requires investing in infrastructure such as waste treatment facilities;
- Keeping carbon emissions below a manageable level, and even make carbon-neutrality a legal requirement;
- Establishing marine sanctuaries;
- Providing safety nets for out-of-work fishers;
- Regulating the fishing industry to protect artisanal fishing from larger commercial entities;
- Outlawing the waste of by-catch;
- Banning plastic bags, styrofoam and single-use plastic products;
- Imposing a moratorium on industrial fishing to allow fisheries to regenerate;
- Making funding available for research, public education and awareness-raising.

The overarching conclusion of the Hearing was that MPs must do more to generate the political will to support the oceans. They should keep the pressure on their governments to do all they can to implement SDG 14. That work should include asking governments for a briefing on preparations for the Oceans Conference on 5–9 June, and on the very important negotiations of a new international agreement to regulate the use of international waters, which account for two thirds of the world's oceans.

Parliamentarians are strongly encouraged to participate in the Oceans Conference as part of their national delegations. They are also encouraged to celebrate World Oceans Day (8 June) by organizing a public event in their parliaments or a debate to review the conclusions of the IPU-UN hearing.

The summary of the Hearing will circulate to the Oceans Conference as an official report from the President of the General Assembly.