



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Panel discussion on *Leading by example on Climate Change: a lighter carbon footprint for parliaments*

Co-organized by the IPU and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliament (ASGP)

*Wednesday, 23 March 2016, 2.30 to 4.30 p.m.
Room 2, Old Wing*

Concept note

Climate change is affecting every country on every continent. Not only are people experiencing its impacts through changing weather patterns, rising sea levels, and more extreme weather events, but it is also disrupting national economies and affecting lives, jeopardizing the resilience and very backbone of societies.

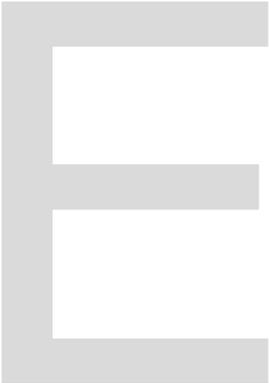
The sustainable future of our people, communities and countries depends on the decisions and leadership actions taken today. Without action, the world's average surface temperature is projected to continue to rise to dangerous levels, likely surpassing 3 degrees Celsius this century—with some areas of the world expected to warm up even more. The poorest and most vulnerable people are being affected the most.

In response to the threat of climate change, on 12 December 2015, 195 countries adopted the first universal climate agreement (COP21, Paris Agreement).

The post-2015 development agenda, formulated along with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in September 2015, also emphasizes the need for climate action through Goal 13.

The IPU has facilitated the active engagement of Member Parliaments in both the SDGs and the COP21 climate change agreement, through the Hanoi Declaration of April 2015, the Declaration of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments (September 2015), and the outcome document of the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21 - December 2015). While parliamentarians have a key role to play in helping ensure implementation of these agreements through their law-making and oversight powers, they can also lead by example by improving their own environmental performance.

The panel discussion will look at parliaments and individual parliamentarians as exemplars of responsible environmental management, and how they can make the most effective contribution to a more sustainable future. In addition to reducing their own ecological footprint, the idea is for parliaments to become more effective legislatures for environmental action, and to provide more credible oversight of environmental performance at the national level. Parliamentarians too can contribute to this effort in their individual capacities by taking steps to both lower their own carbon footprints, thereby serving as role models to their communities.



#IPU134

Responsible environmental management

Informed and ambitious environmental management by institutions, including parliaments, has the potential to significantly reduce both the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from their operation as well as other environmental impacts. Such measures demonstrate commitment to the Agreement reached at COP21 in Paris.

A number of standards exist to improve environmental performance: for example, ISO 14001 and EMAS. If adopted in the intended manner, these provide a structured framework for ensuring that organizations reduce pollution, achieve legal compliance and continually improve environmental performance.

These standards, as well as other less formal approaches to environmental management, succeed best where appropriate leadership, resources and skilled individuals are identified and empowered to take action.

There are a growing number of case studies where the environmental performance of organizations has been significantly improved by adopting and effectively implementing an appropriate environmental management standard. The Scottish Parliament is a case in point. Over a nine-year period, greenhouse gas emissions were reduced by 32 per cent, electricity consumption by 31 per cent, gas by 34 per cent and waste to landfill by 68 per cent. The ISO 14001:2004 standard was used to implement an environmental management system, which helped drive these improvements.

Role of parliaments and parliamentarians

Although the emissions of parliaments as institutions are likely to be modest compared to other areas of commerce and society, by “ensuring their own houses are in order” their leadership position can be strengthened at both the domestic and international levels. Additionally, strong environmental performance will increase credibility and assist with the implementation of the IPU’s Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change, which addresses parliaments’ role in strengthening the international response to climate change.

On a more individual level, as leaders of their communities parliamentarians can also set an example by reducing their own personal consumption. This could help create greater awareness on steps that constituents could also take to reduce their carbon footprints, and lead to broader change among the population.

Panel

The panel aims to examine how parliaments and parliamentarians can significantly improve environmental performance and reduce the emissions associated with their institutions, as well as discuss what an environmentally sustainable parliament should aspire to look like, both now and in the future. It will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to share their views on the subject and identify good practices that could help improve their environmental performance.

Leading questions

- What should an environmentally sustainable parliament look like now and in the future?
- How is the environmental impact of parliament currently measured and what should the scope of efforts aimed at making their carbon footprint lighter be (procurement of goods and services, travel, on-site energy use, and biodiversity, etc.)?
- What practical, technical and leadership skills are required to facilitate improved environmental performance and how can good practices be shared between institutions both domestically and between parliaments at the international level? What forms of technical support might be requested to facilitate improvements?
- What are the immediate concrete steps that parliamentarians or parliamentary staff can take to initiate or advance a process of improving their parliament’s environmental performance? Additionally, what concrete steps can parliamentarians take to reduce their personal consumption and serve as examples of good practices to their constituents?