



**PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE**

Durban (South Africa), 5 December 2011

*Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the
Parliament of the Republic of South Africa*



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**SPEECH BY THE HONORARY IPU PRESIDENT, DR. THEO-BEN GURIRAB,
AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MEETING
ON THE OCCASION OF COP17/CMP7**

Durban, 5 December 2011

Distinguished Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa,
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction,
UNDP Resident Coordinator,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome all of you to the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the Climate Change Conference in Durban.

I want to start by thanking my dear friend, Max Sisulu, Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, for his cooperation and warm hospitality. Our sincere gratitude goes to all parliamentarians and staff members of the host Parliament who have worked relentlessly in preparing this event.

A word of special thanks also goes to the United Nations Development Programme. Its Office in South Africa has provided us with advice and assistance that were indispensable for putting together an interesting programme of discussions.

I take great pleasure in conveying to you kind greetings of the recently elected new IPU President, Mr. Abdelwahad Radi. Morocco held parliamentary elections a few days ago and Mr. Radi was comfortably re-elected. I take this opportunity to congratulate him most warmly. Urgent political tasks in the aftermath of elections have prevented President Radi from travelling to Durban. He has asked me to chair the session on his behalf.

As an Honorary President of the IPU, I take satisfaction in the fact that, during my tenure, parliamentary action on climate change has become a priority for the IPU. I remember that at the IPU Assembly in Nusa Dua, back in 2007, there was a special presidential statement on this subject. The IPU thus started a drive to encourage parliaments to address issues of climate change proactively. All the more reason for us, therefore, to be dismayed by the lack of tangible progress in international climate change negotiations.

Clearly, lawmakers cannot afford to sit idly by and wait for government negotiators to reach binding global agreements. We need to act ourselves through legislation and by holding our respective governments to account.

In some countries this is already the case. From Bangladesh to the United Kingdom, from Mexico to the Philippines, and from Uruguay to South Africa examples of legislative responses to the challenge of climate change are in abundance. Vivid campaigns have also been launched by some regional parliamentary structures, such as Pan-African Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The objective of low-carbon climate-resilient development requires comprehensive legislative frameworks. Clearly, there are numerous political issues at stake. This is what we need to debate.

But we also need to adapt to what has already become a reality. The most recent scientific reports demonstrate that we already experience a warmer climate. In some scenarios, the frequency of hot days would increase by a factor of 10 in most regions of the world. Heavy precipitation would occur more often and the wind speed of tropical cyclones would increase.

Science provides us with insights into how disaster risk management and adaptation can assist vulnerable communities to better cope with a changing climate.

I therefore want to extend a special welcome to Mrs. Margareta Wahlström, who is the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. We are privileged to have her with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Every year, come the month of December, the UN holds its annual climate change session. Thousands of people – including parliamentarians - travel from all over the world to take part.

There are many who ask if this is actually getting us anywhere. Why are the negotiations so slow? Are they going in the right direction? Is the international community capable of ensuring that its collective response is commensurate with the urgency and scale of the challenge?

Yet, this is the only forum that exists for global negotiations on climate change. And it has in-built safeguard mechanisms to protect the interests of developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable. In a world of inequalities, this is not to be overlooked. And it requires political input, participation, legislative follow-up and oversight. That is our role.

This is why the IPU and the South African Parliament have jointly decided that there was good reason for parliamentarians to have their own meeting in Durban. We can bring a unique political input to the process.

The programme of our meeting is very rich. We will start with a special presentation on the complex and divisive issue of climate finance, including fast-track and long-term pledges. We will then turn to the topic of how to create conditions that are conducive to the advancement of low carbon and renewable energy projects.

Next, we will have an overview of progress made in the climate change negotiations taking place at the Convention Centre a few kilometres from here. Lastly, we will discuss how to create synergies between the climate-related efforts of national legislators and local authorities.

At the end of our deliberations, I hope we can reach a consensus on the draft outcome document. It is brief and to the point. It sends a clear message from the global parliamentary community to government negotiators and gives us something to build upon as we go home to our parliaments.

With these few words of introduction, I wish you a fruitful discussion.

Thank you