



Parliamentary Hearing
International Conference on Financing for Development
Doha, Qatar, 28 November 2008



SUMMARY REPORT

Chaired by the President of the IPU, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Hearing was held to provide parliamentarians with an opportunity to exchange views on some of the salient issues before the Conference. In all, some 50 parliamentarians participated.

Welcome remarks were made by the Honorable Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al-Khulaifi, Speaker of the Advisory Council of Qatar. The panel consisted of: Mr. Eckhard Deutscher, Chair of the OECD/DAC Development Assistance Committee; Ms. Jane Stewart, Director of the ILO Office to the United Nations in New York, former MP and cabinet minister (Canada); and Mr. Roberto Bissio, Executive Director of Social Watch and representative of the Civil Society Forum at the Doha Conference.

Mr. E. Deutscher focused on development aid and its importance for inclusive globalization. He suggested that development aid and effectiveness in its delivery were central issues of the Doha Conference. He pointed to the important role of parliaments in ensuring broad national ownership of the development agenda and in holding government to account. He welcomed the strong participation of parliamentarians at the Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in September 2008 and the numerous references to the role of parliament in its outcome document. He was pleased that the IPU would participate in the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness.

However, Mr. Deutscher warned that the financial and economic crises would have a negative impact on aid flows and said that it would be important for the credibility of donors to honour their commitments. On a positive note, he informed the meeting that in a recent statement, OECD DAC members had confirmed their aid commitments and agreed to maintain aid flows in line with those commitments. The performance of DAC donors against that pledge would be monitored by the OECD Secretariat.

Ms. J. Stewart spoke about the importance of employment for development. She stressed that work was at the centre of development and proposed that the ILO declaration on full and productive employment and decent work could provide a simple yet powerful framework for development. Referring to the dual financial and economic crises, she said that they had already resulted in an additional 20 million jobless persons and another 40 million who had to live on less than one US\$ 1 a day. She proposed that work and employment be placed at the centre of any development plan. Echoing other speakers, she hoped that the current crises would give rise to creative thinking and a search for new strategies.

Mr. R. Bissio reminded the parliamentarians that the Monterrey Conference had also been held at a time of crisis. However, the current turmoil that had followed the debt crisis of the world's

biggest economy would be more serious and result in strong pressure on political and social systems, with the most vulnerable the hardest hit. He said that while it was difficult to make predictions, the crises would have a particularly severe impact on developing countries as exports would suffer and commodity prices would drop. He feared that millions of migrant workers from developing countries would be sent back as job opportunities dwindled. That was already happening in the USA, for example, where two million Mexicans were expected to return home the following year. Speaking on behalf of civil society organizations, he said that their presence at the Conference brought a sense of urgency to those issues and called on leaders to take responsible action.

An active discussion followed with interventions by several parliamentarians in attendance. It focused on the following issues:

- *The global financial crisis.* Several speakers and panellists underscored that the crisis had spread from the financial sector to the real economy. In addition, decision-makers had to contend with increasing poverty and unemployment, as well as the growing cost of climate change. Gender was also mentioned as a key cross-cutting issue in many of those crises. The case for decisive counter-cyclical measures to shore up demand and thus reboot the global economy was made.
- *The opportunity for creative thinking and change.* Speakers proposed that the concurrent crises provided an opportunity for reflection on the unfair global income distribution and uneven development and on how to address these issues with a new economic world order and international financial architecture. The new world order must have parliamentary democracy as its backbone.
- *Development aid.* The importance of donors honouring their commitments was touched upon by several speakers. Concern was expressed that aid levels might lag behind and that demonstrating impact and results would be even more necessary to keep donors motivated. At the same time, it was noted that aid alone could not suffice to support the achievement of the MDGs. For that, the entire FfD agenda must be supported.
- *Parliamentary engagement and oversight* will be critical to advance the FfD agenda as a whole, especially at times of crisis. Parliamentary committees must become better informed of development cooperation issues: while dispelling myths about the purpose and impact of aid, parliaments must also intensify their scrutiny of how aid money was actually spent. Parliaments must also be more involved in ensuring that donors' systems on the ground were rationalized, avoiding fragmentation and duplication of efforts.
- *The Parliamentary Message to the International Conference* was referred to in some of the interventions. The Message was found to be balanced and to touch on several issues that were often forgotten in such debates. One such issue had to do with military spending and how it had grown dramatically in recent years, sidestepping development priorities. Support was also expressed for the IPU's decision to convene a global parliamentary conference on the financial crisis in spring 2009.

In his closing remarks, the IPU President appealed to all present to press their national delegations to ensure that two important references on the role of parliament, which were still provisional in the draft outcome document of the Conference, would be preserved.