



PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

*Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union
Geneva, 7 and 8 May 2009*

CLOSING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE DR. THEO-BEN GURIRAB

Geneva, 8 May 2009

We have had two days of intense and rich discussions. We have examined the causes of the economic crisis, its likely evolution and how best to address it. Our debates have been enriched by several keynote speakers and panellists who have shared their expertise and wisdom with us. We have talked about steps that are needed as a matter of urgency and measures that should follow in the medium and longer term. We have discussed our own role as parliamentarians, and what governments and the international community have to do.

It would not be possible to do justice to all of this in one short and inclusive statement. You will be receiving a comprehensive report with a summary of the debates and presentations in about a month's time. I will therefore concentrate my concluding statement at this stage on a few policy areas on which I believe you have voiced support for action.

First, the immediate solution to the crisis will involve the disbursement of very significant amounts of remedial funding. The economy must be revived, jobs need to be created, the financial system must be repaired, trust has to be re-established, and trade and investment need a major boost. To quote the G20 meeting in London last month, we need to build an inclusive, green and sustainable recovery, and that will require very significant amounts of funds.

The financial and economic crisis has its origins in the most developed economies and much of the early rescue efforts are concentrated in these countries. However, the crisis is affecting all countries and particularly the developing and least developed nations, which bear no responsibility at all for today's crisis.

The G20 meeting recognizes that these countries need to be assisted. This means living up to the commitments made on many past occasions.

Second, we have all emphasized the need for greater regulation of the financial sector. There must be much more accountability within and over the banking system than hitherto. Similarly, the credit rating agencies must be regulated and controlled to ensure that the information they produce is not misleading.

Third, employment must be central to the debate. The health of the world economy should not be measured as a function of stock market recovery, but rather in terms of the recovery of job markets, offering employment that provides a basis for survival and which values the dignity of work.

Fourth, much of the discussion centred on the international financial institutions and the need for their reform. It was said that loans provided by the International Monetary Fund should be stripped of the traditional conditionalities and should not be made to the detriment of social welfare.

We parliamentarians must contribute to the design of a new system which is better attuned to the deeper aspirations of our citizens. We should ensure much closer parliamentary interaction with the international financial institutions in a bid to exercise greater parliamentary oversight.

Fifth, we need to recognize that the global financial crisis affects women and men differently, with women hit the hardest. The crisis will at a minimum consolidate entrenched inequalities, but most likely exacerbate them, pushing women even further into poverty. Women are a driving force of our economies, formally and informally, and the solutions to this crisis must therefore build on their potential, recognize their contributions and promote gender equality. In parliament we must make sure that the policies and programs that are developed to address the current crisis take account of gender equality and political participation by women and apply tools such as gender sensitive budgeting.

Contrary to the belief of many, the crisis is reversible. Indeed, it is an opportunity to achieve real progress in our societies, remedying existing inequalities and imbalances, and building new systems based on inclusion, transparency and good governance. We must use our role as the elected leaders of our citizens and communities to sustain the public optimism that this will require.

Colleagues,

The tasks that lie before our governments in bringing a thorough reform to our financial systems and in forging a world that is less crisis-prone, are enormous. As we have seen over the last two days, we as parliamentarians have a major stake in the success of any reform. The best kind of support we can provide to our governments is, in fact, stringent oversight. As the reforms proceed - and they will take years and not months - our people will depend upon us to both keep them fully informed of developments, and to make absolutely sure that their views and aspirations are taken into full account.

Thank you.