



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians

Session 2 Part 2: Protecting the Planet

Mr. Vytautas Gapsys

Parliamentary Initiatives and Good Practices

Lusaka, 17 March 2016

Honourable Minister Dora Siliya, Minister of Energy,
Mr. Martim Maya, UNDP Country Director in Zambia,
Mr. Abel Musumali, Founder and CEO of Green Enviro-Watch (GEW)
Mr. and Ms. Rapporteur,
Colleagues and friends,

I would like to thank my co-panellists for their very insightful presentations on the excellent work being done to protect the planet, from the grassroots level, to the government and global levels.

As has been mentioned before, worldwide action to protect our planet is the biggest challenge that we, as a global community are facing. It affects all men and women – especially the most vulnerable – and is perhaps the defining challenge of our time. It is also one that inherently requires a true partnership that includes all countries and people.

The scale and complexity of this colossal challenge is well known:

- At the current pace, by the year 2100:
 - o The increase in the average world temperature could be as high as 4.6 degrees Celsius;
 - o Sea levels could rise by 1 meter, affecting 600 to 700 million people;
- Changing weather patterns will affect drinking water and crop levels, especially in areas where scarcity already exists.
- Vulnerable people will be most at risk and small island states – many who literally risk being engulfed by the seas - are already facing catastrophic circumstances. This danger can destroy the livelihoods of millions and threatens basic human rights.

In all of that, young people will pay a high price of course!

Despite these grim statistics, there is some reason for optimism. As you know, to confront this challenge world leaders succeeded in forging an agreement in Paris during the COP 21 Conference late last year. The agreement aims to limit the rise in global temperatures to well below two degrees Celsius. With the whole world on side and with strong political momentum for change, we face a window of opportunity that cannot be squandered. Our generation is the last one that can curb climate change.

To be credible, effective and legally enforceable, this international agreement must be transposed into national legislation, and supported by appropriate budgetary measures and robust oversight of government performance. This puts parliaments at the heart of the global response.

To rise to the challenge, the IPU and the Parliament of France assembled around 600 parliamentarians for an inter-parliamentary meeting alongside the Paris Conference. The goal was to provide parliamentarians with an opportunity to obtain first-hand information on the main issues and approaches of COP21, to interact with government negotiators involved in the Conference decision-making process, to gain better knowledge of recommendations with regard to parliamentary action on climate change, and to exchange views on parliamentary follow-up to the Paris Conference.

Parliamentarians acknowledged that rising temperatures are caused by human activity. They highlighted the priority objectives of mitigation and adaptation, the latter especially for those most vulnerable and small-island developing states. They also stressed the need for states to help finance the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies, and the need for transfers of technology, knowledge, and good practices, for capacity building in developing countries. Lastly, world parliamentarians took on a people-centred approach that underlined the importance of involving young people and recognizing gender equality as a fundamental principle.

To support the climate change effort, the IPU has prepared a Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change, which will be presented for adoption at the upcoming 134th IPU Assembly here in Zambia next week. The Action Plan is a how-to-guide for parliamentarians to take action. Our active participation is required in order to protect the planet. Otherwise, we don't stand a chance.

I am pleased to share with you some of the most important ways that we parliamentarians can contribute to advancing this agenda and use our functions to help save our planet. We can make a difference in 5 points:

1. By developing or amending legislation that brings our national laws in line with national climate goals and the Paris agreement. By doing this, we must focus both on mitigation of greenhouse emissions, and adaptation to minimize risks.
2. By strengthening oversight of national and international commitments and promoting transparent and accountable climate action data and reporting.
3. By improving consistency and complementarity between national climate legislation and other societal goals, such as human rights, poverty reduction, gender equality, and so forth.
4. By doing our part to accelerate ratification and implementation of the Paris Agreement.
5. By leading the way in changing mentalities and mindsets regarding environmental issues. We need to promote change among the business sector, our parliaments, and in our communities.

If adopted at the upcoming Assembly, parliamentarians have also agreed to a timeline to accomplish these objectives. This begins with a comprehensive review of the existing national legislation related to climate change by the end of 2016, and culminates with the ratification of the Paris Agreement by June 2018 by all parliaments, at the latest.

We, as young parliamentarians, obviously have a huge stake in these efforts at the global level. In the end, it is us, and future generations, that will need to live with the consequences of the global effort. We must, therefore, make sure not only to fully participate in the political process towards bringing about a greener planet, but also be key drivers in making sure objectives get realized. As young MPs, here are some of the additional things that we can do:

1. Make sure that young people are represented in committees or in groups focused on climate change and provide political momentum as a matter of priority. If these groups do not exist, we should build them, like our colleagues did here in Zambia.
2. We should also work "across the aisle" in these efforts. Climate change should not be a partisan issue, since it affects all of us, regardless of political party.
3. Facilitate the participation of youth groups in contributing both to legislation and oversight, and ensure public debate on the topic, including through social media.

4. Promote measures to incentivize innovation, in particular with regard to clean energy, adaptation, and increased energy efficiency.
5. Ensure that data on populations is disaggregated by age and by sex, so that young men and women are represented in reporting and policy-making.
6. Make sure that young people participate in international discussions and conferences so that we get direct access to the international community and the opportunity to benefit from their expertise and support. On this note I would like to thank the IPU for always including young MPs in these important global discussions.

These steps cover the more formal actions we can take, but we can also do more.

We may be legislators and government scrutinizers, but more than that, we are representatives of the people and community leaders who can lead by example. We can also lower our own individual carbon footprint in the work that we do, and in doing so raise awareness on climate issues for others to take notice. We can take public transportation or bicycles to work, or enforce a paperless environment in our offices. By promoting these practices in our communities, and on social media, we can have a real influence in ways that bypass the long procedural nature of parliaments.

Parliaments are also addressing climate change by leading by example and making their buildings greener and more energy efficient through renewable energy and new technologies. For example, the Parliament of Pakistan now gets its electricity from solar panels, and the Israeli Knesset has gone to great lengths to make its parliament greener. Although the emissions of parliaments as institutions are likely to be modest compared to other areas of society, by “ensuring that our own houses are in order” our leadership position and credibility can be strengthened at both the domestic and international levels.

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, I would like say a word about the costs associated with addressing climate change. Yes, the world is coming out of a global recession, and economic times are tough. Many may argue that now is not the time to worry about climate change. That we should instead focus on development, and that the two are incompatible. I respectfully disagree.

Development and climate change are inextricably linked. The two go hand-in-hand. By addressing climate change today, we are securing sustainable development. By the same token, nothing can derail development more than environmental catastrophe, increased natural disasters, and the destabilizing effects of environmental migration. These too have enormous economic costs, and, more importantly, human rights costs. Simply put, over the long-term, the costs of doing nothing far exceed the costs of acting. As parliamentarians we are in a position to chart this new direction. Let's be courageous, and make the most of this opportunity together.

Thank you.