Member Debrief: Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference

A conference jointly organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the French Parliament, 5-6 December 2015

The IPU co-organised in partnership with the French Parliament a Parliamentary Meeting during the COP21 proceedings in Paris. The Meeting was a welcomed opportunity to bring MPs from over 80 countries and 20 parliamentary organisations together to discuss the role that legislators have in implementation and inspection of the agreed-upon resolutions by heads of state participating in COP21. Important issues such as the role that MPs have in implementing their government’s respective Intended National Determined Contributions (INDGs), in advocating for the poorest in the world who are more vulnerable to climate change in the future, and finding local solutions by working with actors on the ground to achieve the “glocal” nature of the intended COP21 agreements, were emphasised.

The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & IMF (PN) had 3 Board Members present for the proceedings, including Hon. Jeremy Lefroy (Chair of the PN, MP UK), Hon. Olfa Soukri Cherif (Vice-Chair of the PN, MP Tunisia), and Hon. Oscar Mauricio Lizcano Arango (MP Colombia). Further, several MPs who are Members of the PN were present within their respective national delegations. The two day conference was chaired by the President of the IPU, Hon. Saber Chowdhury (MP Bangladesh) and IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong, featuring keynote addresses by Hon. Claude Bartolone (President of the French National Assembly), Hon. Gérard Larcher (President of the French Senate), Ban Ki-moon (United Nations Secretary-General), Laurent Fabius (French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development), Arnold Schwarzenegger (Founder of R20 – Regions of Climate Action, pictured right), Ségolène Royal (French Minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy), Achim Steiner (Executive Director of the UNEP), Angel Gurría (Secretary-General of the OECD), Irina Bokova (Director-General of UNESCO), and Mary Robinson (Former President of Ireland, UN Secretary-General Special Envoy for Climate Change).

IPU President Chowdhury noted that this was the largest gathering of MPs on the occasion of a COP meeting, emphasising that the “agreement is not only an end, but a beginning” with the signing of the agreed-upon Resolution drafted by Rapporteur of the meeting, Hon. Hervé Maurey (Senator France). This outcomes document was reviewed at the meeting and given consideration to the drafters of the COP21 agreement at le Bourget.
INDGs’ ATTAINMENT

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius shared his views as a former MP in France: “You will be at the heart of implementation, translation, monitoring, and enforcement.” His remarks were seconded by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, as “Parliamentarians are essential in the implementation of the agreement in Paris.” Hon. Bartolone stressed the importance to “leverage our constitutional efforts together,” while OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría urged the participants to follow the Green Growth Framework and, “put a big fat price on carbon; that is the enemy, [let’s] hit it on the head.” UNESCO Secretary General Irina Bokova declared “I am convinced by the importance of Parliaments in ensuring effective oversight, as implementation is the key.”

Questions and comments pertaining to this topic were posited from several MPs to the speakers, including that of Lord Prescott from the UK, commenting on the previous role that MPs had in the Kyoto Protocol. “The Paris accord brings MPs into the fold,” he noted, adding that there is a clear and fundamental change that must take place to have legislators getting recognition in their role and impact in combating climate change. Hon. Gertrude Mulumemui Imenda (MP Zambia) sought to further understand how the international community could help legislators in policy and civil code training in order to allow further INDGs’ implementation efforts to succeed. IPU President Chowdhury agreed, stressing that in the future, the quality of financing and oversight functions of legislators go hand-in-hand, as looking into impact and training MPs to take this approach would be beneficial in implementing the INDGs. Hon. Nico Schrijver (MP Netherlands) wanted to add that there needed to be an international and institutional climate architectural framework as a resource for implementing INDGs and coordinating climate change mitigation initiatives.

ADVOCACY FOR THE VULNERABLE AND POOREST

MPs were also encouraged to consider climate change as part of the goal to eradicate global poverty. Senate President Larcher set the tone early, declaring that the “poorest countries are the most vulnerable and will more fragile without action” as it pertains to climate change. As Mary Robinson put it, “The world must eradicate poverty, inequality, and mitigate climate change.” IPU President Chowdhury stressed from the outset of the Meeting that “we want to ensure that poverty belongs to
the museum of the past.” **UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner** pointed towards the excellent opportunity for the COP21 to address global labour and unemployment issues, asking “when to markets lead and when do markets follow?” President of the Andean Parliament and **Senator Luis Fernando Duque García** (Colombia) noted that those who pollute the least are those who suffer the most and vice-versa. Further the Amazonia region has the richest biodiversity in the world, and is being depleted due to the effects of climate change. **Ms. Bokova** added that “Responding to climate change is more than politics; it is human rights, mobilising innovation, building resilience across communities, and justice and equity.” **Hon. Ionaș-Florin Urcan** representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) added that the COP21 implementation must leave no one behind and be inclusive.

The participants had opportunities to interact with the speakers, as **Hon. Abdelhakim Benchamach** from Morocco suggested, “We need to move from speech to action. The best possible result would be when we move from paper to deed. People are struggling for human dignity.” He emphasised the need to develop a national action plan for sustainable development, and encouraged the participants and speakers to attend the COP22 event which will be hosted in Morocco. An MP from Mexico added that although much is being done to combat climate change, undoubtedly interest groups are holding parliaments ‘hostage’, seeking to know what legislators can do to resist pressure from industries that will be adversely impacted by the fight against climate change. **Hon. Birgitta Jónsdóttir** from Iceland asked how gender issues should be integrated into climate policies, and **Hon. Olfa Soukri Cherif** (MP Tunisia, Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Network) agreed, discussing how women need to be included in this discussion as active stakeholders. **Hon. Rosaline J. Smith** from Sierra Leone spoke on the need to educate the adverse effects of climate change on women and children, most notably how the use of fossil fuels contributes to malnutrition and poor health, making those who are already vulnerable even more exposed to systemic inequalities.

It was clear from the proceedings of the Meeting that not only are MPs key implementers of the COP21 final agreement, but that the link between global poverty, inequality, and climate change are reticent factors which will determine the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their achievement in 2030.

**GLOBAL SOLUTIONS**

Finally, MPs were highlighted as key interlocutors between local citizens for whom they represent and international organisations; they are the catalyst for the ‘glocal’ framework that we must have going forward. **Arnold Schwarzenegger** pointed towards his previous success as Governor of California, as “Sub-national governments have the power of working from the bottom-up. We enacted revolutionary laws when the Federal Government froze negotiations.” He stressed the need to remove politics out of the discourse and think about solutions
which can be enacted today. **Ecology Minister Ségolène Royal** (pictured above) furthered this belief; “More than 70% of effective actions happen at the local level.” She sees the mitigation of carbon emissions, pollution and biodiversity degradation as items that can be attained at a local level with enthusiasm and action from citizens. Finally, **Mary Robinson** emphasised that “all members of society need to step up,” as we have a responsibility to follow through with an enlightened self-interest of humanity.

The MPs highlighted many topics, as **Hon. Denise Pascal Allende** (MP Chile) addressed the imperative of combating climate change through education and schooling. **Senator Lucila Carmen Crexell** (Argentina) asked how MPs could simplify access to financing for development and avoid “middlemen” and procedures that are unresponsive to the needs of today. **President of GLOBE International Cedric Frolick** (MP South Africa) agreed and said these types of initiatives would become a focus of his organisation in the future. **Hon. Kevin De León** of the California State Senate informed the participants of how California has proactively created local solutions which have a global impact; “We are tackling this head on and not holding our breath for DC or COP21,” he said, urging the participants to democratise their climate policies in order to have access to the best energy and calibrate the new economy to create jobs and future prosperity. **Secretary General Ban Ki-moon** (pictured right) affirmed these ideas by noting that domestic legislators “are representing the voices and aspirations of the whole world. I am urging you to demonstrate global leadership.” MPs are clearly a conduit for glocal action.

The IPU Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of COP21 allowed a thorough exchange between MPs and global leaders who have a mutual interest in sustaining our globe and creating prosperity for all. It is clear after the Meeting that legislators have a crucial role to play in implementation of the COP21 final agreement, advocating for global poverty eradication through climate change mitigation initiatives, and liaising with local and global leaders to create the world we wish to see for going forward. The outcomes document and resolution will, as **IPU President Chowdhury** pointed out, “send a strong political message when heading back to our respective Parliaments.”