



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Second Committee of the General Assembly

Agenda item 20: Sustainable Development

**Statement by Mr. Miguel Bermeo
Permanent Observer**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chairperson,

The Rio+20 will not go down in history as the game-changer many had hoped for. But as was observed just last week at the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City, where a stock-taking discussion took place, after all a conference can only provide a snapshot of a picture that is constantly evolving: what matters is the long view perspective and our commitment to work together for real change.

Of course, when it comes to sustainable development, change is not easy: it depends first and foremost on strong political will from all sides to take decisions not only with the immediate interests of specific constituencies in mind but also, and more critically, from the perspective of what is best for the global community as a whole. Another challenge is finding a way to look past the next election so as make decisions based on the welfare of future generations and of mother earth. In all of this, parliamentarians of course must be part of the solution.

With respect to the central theme of the conference, the green economy, our members' position in the lead up to Rio took a cautious approach: the green economy is full of promises for both developed and developing countries, but does not in itself provide all of the answers. The green economy will succeed for the whole of society only under certain conditions, such as if the overall macroeconomic framework is clearly geared toward narrowing inequalities, if green technologies are evenly distributed and widely owned, and if social safety nets are strengthened to help people accomplish the transition. It is also most critical for the green economy to apply differently to developed and developing countries, so that while the latter are still finding ways to achieve significant gains in economic growth, the former should focus less on growth as traditionally defined but also on other measures of wellbeing that in the final analysis are more important than constant increases of material consumption and production.

Indeed, the question of what *type* of growth we want will determine the future of the sustainable development agenda. It is abundantly clear from the poor scorecard of the prevailing development model, with the per capita ecological footprint deteriorating, and with nearly no country on course to effectively decouple economic activity from environmental degradation, that a rethink of our economic foundations is in order.

This is why the next major Assembly of the IPU in March of next year will have as its main theme the question of growth versus wellbeing. While it is obviously impossible to foresee the outcome of that discussion, what matters for now is to note that parliamentarians are ready to take it on. This may eventually help support the reflection here at the UN, under the rubric of "harmony with nature", but also in connection with the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mr. Chairperson,

The agreement on key principles for a new generation of SDGs is indeed one of the achievements of the Rio conference that the IPU wholeheartedly supports. As the MDGs taught us, decision-makers generally like the idea of a clear set of goals to help them set priorities. In fact, international goals such as these provide an important countervailing force against the short-term pressures I mentioned earlier. As the Secretary-General and others have emphasized, the SDGs should not depart entirely from the MDGs but carry forward their unfinished business while integrating that into a new global vision of sustainability for both developing and developed countries. With climate change approaching a point of no return, to mention just one of the major global challenges that have come into focus since 2000, it is obvious that we can no longer talk about development as if it was mostly the

concern of the developing countries. *Sustainable* development is our common challenge and one that we can't afford to postpone anymore.

We have taken note of the various processes now under way at the UN, from the High Level Panel of the Secretary-General to the Working Group of the General Assembly, which together will contribute to the reflection on the post-2015 development framework and particularly these new goals. We also welcome the specific provision in this year's General Assembly resolution on "interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU" (A/66/261) that calls for a parliamentary contribution to this emerging discussion. We are determined to work with the UN system to help channel this contribution at both national and global levels. A major milestone in this respect will be next year's Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, where we expect some 200 parliamentarians to review the proposals that will emerge from the various UN processes in the coming months.

Although we can expect the contribution of parliamentarians to range widely in scope and direction, I can anticipate two overarching issues that have already come up in our internal debates, namely, governance and development cooperation. As was also discussed in the inaugural lecture of this committee session, the problem of development is not merely economic but *political*, in that those most concerned are being kept out of the discussion and away from the decision-making process. To us at IPU, that in turns comes down to an issue of governance that has to do with the way government works, how parliaments are constituted, and therefore how laws are made and implemented. If we want to make real strides with a new set of SDGs, then it will be important that they include, in one way or another, a strong commitment to governance.

With regard to development cooperation, the position we have taken in the Development Cooperation Forum and elsewhere is that very clearly the new SDGs will need to establish a successor to the current MDG8. Roughly put, that goal was meant to answer the question of how the other goals were going to be paid for. We will certainly need to answer a similar question with regard to the SDGs but in a way that takes into account the new picture of development cooperation in the light of the DCF as well as last year's Busan Partnership agreement.

Finally, Mr. Chairperson, allow me to say a few words on the institutional side of the matter. *The Future We Want*, as the Rio agreement was called, did not unfortunately acknowledge a clear role for parliaments or parliamentarians, in spite of our efforts to that effect, and in spite of some clear recommendations from the preceding Global Sustainability Panel. Still, paragraph nine of the Rio document acknowledges the need for "institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic." In addition, the section on *Engaging Major Groups and Other Stakeholders* refers vaguely to legislative bodies as some of the stakeholders to be involved in the follow up.

We hope very much that the High Level Forum of the ECOSOC that is to be constituted will be open enough to accommodate the perspective of parliamentarians. The addition of this Forum will impact the overall architecture of ECOSOC, hopefully resulting in a better integration of economic, social and environmental policies. As our parliamentary members recommended at this year's Kampala assembly, ECOSOC's economic pillar could be further strengthened by the constitution of a new Global Economic Council.

Thank you for your attention. .