



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

Building political support and inclusive responses to sustainable recovery



General Assembly Hall

17 and 18 February 2022, New York

Summary report

Introduction

1. The 2022 Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations (UN) was jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Office of the President of the General Assembly. The theme of the hearing was ***Building political support and inclusive responses to sustainable recovery***. The hearing was held in the General Assembly Hall on the 17 and 18 February 2022.

2. The hearing was an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss how to create political will to build a world that is sustainable, inclusive, and just. Participants shared best practices on tackling inequality; working towards gender parity; including women, youth, minorities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups; and on addressing climate change by fighting the interests of industrial conglomerates.

3. The hearing included five panel discussions featuring a mix of Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, and UN officials as well as a special briefing on the role of parliaments at the UN, for a more effective multilateralism to address global challenges.

4. The hearing brought together some 160 members of parliament from 63 countries.

Opening session

5. **Mr. Abdulla Shahid**, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly, said that, to build a sustainable recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, the world needed strong leadership and collaboration. Having witnessed firsthand what humans could achieve through joint efforts and ingenuity, including on renewable energy and vaccines, he had based his presidency on a message of hope. But for maximum impact, everyone must work together to generate political will, and parliamentarians must implement and fund policies that would imminently deliver results for all people.

6. **Mr. Duarte Pacheco**, President of the IPU, reminded parliamentarians to hold their governments accountable to the commitments the latter had already made at the United Nations. To solve the present challenges, there was a need to combine national and global actions; to include youth, women, and other marginalized groups; to rethink consumption and production patterns and the relationship with nature; and to turn to new solutions beyond “business as usual”.

7. The summaries of the five panel discussions and the special briefing session are placed below.

Panel 1: Growing economic inequalities as a threat to sustainable development: Drivers and possible solutions

8. There is an urgent need to rethink the way our economies work in order to prevent gross concentration of wealth and address widening inequalities, which have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parliamentarians must focus on long-term solutions instead of short-term measures dictated by electoral cycles. They should use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) as a framework for building inclusive and sustainable economies. They must hold governments accountable for implementing policies, and ensure they are properly funded.

9. To this effect the following **recommendations on addressing inequality** should be considered by Member States and Parliamentarians:

- a) Consider raising taxes on multinational companies which pay almost no tax by taking advantage of loopholes in the tax system. A unitary tax system, for example, would allow every country to treat subsidiaries as separate companies and tax them based on their share of profits, employment, and assets in that country, preventing the practice of “profit shifting” to avoid high tax jurisdictions. Multinational companies should be taxed at a minimum rate of 25 per cent, which is the median of global rates.
- b) Combat tax evasion on a global scale, including by instituting national asset registries and sharing them with other countries so the world’s wealthiest people cannot park their money in tax havens.
- c) Consider the issuance of more Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF’s reserve asset. SDR liquidity accounts for only about 7 per cent of global liquidity. Rich countries that do not use SDRs can recycle them to a climate trust that funds climate mitigation projects, and even poor countries that do not use them could add to their reserves and improve their borrowing capacity.
- d) Regulate global capital flows to incentivize green investments and disincentivize brown investments.
- e) Address social and economic imbalances that perpetuate inequality. This includes valuing and distributing the burden of care which overwhelmingly falls to women. In this regard, a system to compensate women for caring for children, older adults, sick people, and people with disabilities has been proposed.
- f) Look at inequalities beyond income and wealth. People also care about health, education, and opportunities for their children which is why parliamentarians must look past economic growth to improve people’s livelihoods.
- g) Demand vaccine equity (through measures such as strengthening the World Health Organization (WHO)) so that vaccines and treatments for COVID-19 and other viruses are available to everyone. Pandemics cannot end until we eradicate them everywhere.

Strong consideration should be given to waving patent rights of vaccine formulas and vaccine production know-how so that distribution can be rapidly scaled up to enable quick inoculation of everyone eligible for a vaccine.

- h) Consider new modes of global governance and public investment that would reflect justice and inclusion instead of perpetuating existing imbalances. To fight inequality and help the poor, the creation of the World Plan for Fraternity and Well-being was suggested, which would be funded voluntarily by the world's richest people, corporations, and countries. Parliamentarians must consider new ways of taxing and regulating digital and social media companies.
- i) Ensure private companies are socially responsible, pay fair wages, respect workers' rights and the environment, and give back to the communities in which they work.
- j) Encourage wealthy countries to help developing countries access financial resources they need to stimulate growth. Support countries that host large numbers of refugees. Use multilateralism and international cooperation to help United Nations Member States eliminate inequality within and between nations.

Panel 2: Building on the past to improve the future: Youth inclusion and the need for inter-generational justice

10. Youth account for 1.2 billion of the world's population, and 85 per cent of this youth live in developing countries. While more than half of the globe's residents are under 30, according to the IPU only 2 per cent of members of parliament are under 30. A new social contract is needed to ensure youth are included in politics and decision-making bodies and given the tools they need to thrive.

11. To this effect the following **recommendations on including youth** should be considered by Member States and Parliamentarians:

- (a) Set quotas for youth participation in all levels of government through constitutional amendments, legislative measures, and new laws. Enforce quotas through financial penalties, sanctions, and other means.
- (b) Lower the minimum eligibility age for voting and running for political office.
- (c) Ensure political bodies and other decision-making institutions are:
 - i. Transparent and accountable: young people do not approve the concentration of power in the hands of a few.
 - ii. Safe: youth want to speak truth to power and share their experiences.
 - iii. Equitable, inclusive, and diverse: young people expect institutions to include migrants, refugees, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized voices.
- (d) Rely on existing resources, such as the IPU's *I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!* campaign which includes six pledges to make parliaments younger, and the UN Secretary-General's

proposal for a *Youth in Politics Index* which aims to make decision-making more diverse and representative.

- (e) Include youth in decision-making bodies and delegations, along with considering the following suggestions:
 - i. Form and support bodies, forums, and institutions dedicated to young people, such as youth ministries and assemblies.
 - ii. The IPU Members should send at least one parliamentarian under 40 to next year's annual IPU Hearing at the UN.
 - iii. Put youth at the center of plans on development, humanitarian assistance, peace and security, and human rights.
 - iv. Work to include youth not only in political bodies but also in boards of private companies, citizen associations, and trade groups.
- (f) Build trust between youth and political institutions by addressing issues that matter to young people, including climate change, inequality, and diversity.
- (g) Provide free and quality education for all. This includes comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services so youth can make informed decisions about their bodies and lives.
- (h) Prioritize mental health services, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many children and young people have missed school and could not socialize with their peers because of the pandemic, which has taken a mental toll.
- (i) Tackle disenfranchisement by focusing on job creation. Support internship, employment, entrepreneurship, and professional training programmes.
- (j) Engage youth in the work of changing social norms, behaviours, and laws that contribute to inequality.

Panel 3: Leaving no one behind: The rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups

12. In addition to women and youth, other marginalized voices continue to be shut out of social and political life. These include indigenous people, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and ethnic and religious minorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on these groups, including higher death rates and increased violence against some minority groups. Governments must work to reach these individuals, give them a seat at the table, and ensure their rights are fully realized. States that promote minority rights are more likely to remain tolerant and stable.

13. To this effect the following **recommendations for addressing the needs of vulnerable groups** should be considered by Member States and Parliamentarians:

- a) Use a human rights-centered approach which provides the instruments and framework for serving all individuals, including the vulnerable. Oversee your government's role in

meeting existing obligations; ensure they are reflected in national policies and are properly funded.

- b) Aggregate research and data on COVID-19 cases by factors such as ethnic origin, race and gender. Use targeted measures to reach these groups. For example, emergency aid could target minorities in the informal economy most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- c) Ensure people without identification, social security, or health insurance can access services. Share information with minority communities in their languages. As part of outreach, use radio, public service announcements and other means of communication.
- d) Ensure governments' declarations on COVID-19 are not used to negatively target minority groups or individuals. Prevent and combat human rights violations, including hate speech, discrimination, violence and online harassment.
- e) Promote respect for diversity and human dignity. Address gaps in laws and legislation regarding issues such as discrimination, xenophobia and racism, and enact proactive policies to address these issues. To help create responsible and tolerant citizens, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be distributed to secondary students and its significance taught in class.
- f) Do not rush to return to fiscally conservative policies. Governments have enacted more than 3,800 social protection measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in part to help with the loss of an equivalent of 255 million jobs, most of them in the informal sector. Those measures should not be lifted prematurely.
- g) To tackle social exclusion, focus on jobs. The Secretary-General's recently launched platform *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection* aims to create employment opportunities, particularly in the green and digital economies.
- h) Use quotas to boost minorities' participation in political bodies and civil service. Empower minorities, migrants, refugees and others to become active members of society.
- i) Scale up successful partnerships, such as the Indigenous Navigator which allows indigenous peoples to collect data and monitor the implementation of their rights; the ILO Global Business Disability Network, which brings multinational companies and disability networks together; and ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative (FRI) which works with migrant workers' organizations to promote fair practices.
- j) Build trust between people and institutions to create a new social contract that works for everyone. Work with all stakeholders, including state and tribal governments, faith-based and community organizations, philanthropy, the academia and private industry.
- k) Recognize communal land ownership which is an important part of indigenous heritage.

Panel 4: Gender equality in decision-making as a key to sustainable recovery: The litmus test of inclusive politics

14. The COVID-19 pandemic has widened existing gender gaps, and women continue to be underrepresented in most decision-making venues. Only one in four members of parliament is a woman; and, according to the IPU, only five parliaments have 50 per cent or more women representatives. While in no country do women enjoy equal pay for equal work, or participate equally in the workforce, countries that are the closest to equality have more productive economies as well as healthier and happier citizens. Gender-balanced parliaments translate into gender-responsive policies that lead to economic growth, environmental sustainability, and improved outcomes in areas such as health, education, and peace and security.

15. To this effect the following **recommendations for addressing gender inequality** should be considered by Member States and Parliamentarians:

- a) Use legislative quotas to increase women's participation in all levels of government. Ensure quotas are ambitious, properly enforced and aim for full gender parity. Include these goals for taskforces set up to address the pandemic, where women average only 1 in 4 participants.
- b) Ensure equal access to education for girls and women. Women cannot become political leaders if girls are not educated.
- c) Eliminate discrimination that still exists in many laws. Insist on laws and policies that tackle issues such as the gender pay gap and gender-based violence.
- d) Address violence against women in politics. This has amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially online. Recent years have also seen a rise in backlash politics against women politicians. Harassment and violence against women must be legislated against and perpetrators held accountable. Parliaments must be safe and gender-sensitive so that women can participate without threats of sexism, discrimination, and violence.
- e) Redistribute the burden of childcare and housework, as women do three times the work at home as men. Provide paid parental leave and affordable childcare which are critical for ensuring women's participation in working and political life.
- f) Promote gender equality at home, work, and in public life. Some examples:
 - i. Men must participate in childcare and housekeeping duties, and promote positive masculinity to help change harmful mindsets and behaviours.
 - ii. Recognizing parliaments' visible role in society, male parliamentarians must set an example by being strong allies in the quest for equality, speaking up on the issue, and by supporting gender quotas and other policies. Use parliamentary powers to go into schools and workplaces to elevate the fight for gender equality.
 - iii. Help others understand gender equality does not just benefit girls and women, but also boys, men, economies, and entire societies.
- g) Enact gender-responsive policies and budgeting across legislative areas and sectors. Engage all stakeholders, including the academia, civil society, and private businesses. Follow guidance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the IPU, and work with UN country teams.

- h) Implement and fund existing resolutions, treaties, and conventions that focus on eliminating discrimination, gender inequality, and violence against women and girls.
- i) Focus on maintaining peace and conflict prevention. Instability, conflict, and war force women to leave schooling and work to support their families and communities. Every pandemic, conflict, and crisis slows down progress on gender equality and sets society back. Prioritize people over weapons, and pass budgets accordingly.

Special briefing: Parliaments at the UN, for a more effective multilateralism to address global challenges

One way to devise effective policy solutions for global problems is by strengthening multilateralism. This, in a nutshell, is the political mission of the IPU at the UN.

The IPU and parliamentarians bring people's voices to the UN thus enriching deliberations that lead to key treaties and conventions. The IPU has a seat at the UN and speaks on behalf of parliaments. It also builds political support for the UN and helps parliaments implement commitments their governments made at the UN. The IPU plays a central role in fostering multilateralism, international cooperation and dialogue which are greatly needed to confront today's complex global problems.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people living in poverty has increased, the gender gap has widened, and income inequality between and within countries has grown. Many parliaments have been partnering with the UN to address these challenges and work towards a sustainable recovery. The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report, which emphasizes the importance of enhancing parliamentary input into the UN's work, provides a framework for strengthening multilateral agreements and building a new social contract for future generations.

Panel 5: Making good on climate change commitments: The people vs. organized interests

16. While public pressure for strong measures to combat the climate crisis has been growing, the world is still heading towards global temperature increases that will have irreversible effect on people and the environment. Political will is needed to urgently respond to climate change and support countries that need help with transitioning to green energy and greener economies. Unless production and consumption patterns are transformed to significantly reduce the world's ecological footprint, our children and grandchildren's generations will experience more fires, floods, famine and other devastating effects of climate change.

17. To this effect the following **recommendations for addressing the climate crisis** should be considered by Member States and Parliamentarians:

- a) Adopt policies to phase out fossil fuels as well as public subsidies and financing for their exploration and production. Fossil fuels account for three-fourths of global greenhouse gas emissions and 80 per cent of global energy supply. Some suggestions:

- i. Help people understand that wind and solar energy are the cheapest form of energy supply in most markets.
 - ii. Rethink budgeting and reform international finance systems to gear all investments toward sustainable development and support people during transition to the green economy. Work with asset owners, managers, banks and others to cut fossil fuel investments and prioritize green energy.
 - iii. Follow best practices and join existing efforts, such as Costa Rica's and Denmark's Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance (BOGA), the world's first diplomatic initiative focused on keeping oil and gas in the ground. Additionally, 40 countries and institutions have launched a commitment to end international public finance for fossil fuels by the end of 2022.
 - iv. Break the fossil fuel industry's hold on political power which it acquires through campaign contributions and lobbying, then uses to reap benefits through tax breaks, subsidies and supportive policies. Regulate lobbying to make it more transparent and ethical.
- b) Listen to underrepresented voices and include them in decision-making. These include indigenous people, women, youth, people with disabilities, minorities and others living in most impacted communities.
- c) Invest in a sustainable blue economy and life below water, as outlined in SDG 14. More than 90 per cent of the planet's living space is water. Oceans will absorb 90 per cent of the heat from global temperature increases, affecting everything from coral reefs to marine life. Changing conditions on land means seas and oceans will need to provide food, renewable energy and other resources.
- d) Draft short- and long-term climate policies. Clearly communicate about the costs and benefits of legislation, and ensure citizens are informed. To educate consumers, push for products to include information about their carbon footprint.
- e) Take a multi-level, system-wide, and cross-sectoral approach:
 - i. Focus on the bottom-up principle by starting locally, and work with all levels of government. Local and regional authorities are responsible for more than 70 per cent of climate mitigation strategies and 65 per cent of public investments, so they can strongly shape climate policy.
 - ii. Use a system-wide strategy to include all actors, including producers, consumers, states and all levels of government.
 - iii. Pursue climate commitments in all sectors that are significant contributors to green gas emissions, including industry, agriculture and waste, forest and nature, transport, and buildings and construction work.
- f) Focus on accountability. Governments, financial and private companies have made climate pledges and commitments, but better oversight and harsher penalties are needed to ensure they are meeting the targets.
- g) Prioritize proposals that are efficient, inclusive, smart and targeted. This means ensuring policies are both cost- and resource-efficient; accessible to everyone; technically agnostic; and use a targeted approach.

- h) Stress that climate change is not just about the future, but the present. It is affecting everything from our health to environment, and has led to more frequent and severe floods, droughts, fires, storms, cyclones and other life-threatening crises.
- i) Consider constitutional amendments and other tools to prioritize environmental protection in laws, legislation, regulations and budgets.
- j) Link climate policies with social and economic ones to ensure the most vulnerable individuals are not negatively affected. Align COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts with climate-friendly policies.

Conclusion

18. The hearing emphasized the need to build trust between individuals and governments, protect the world's most poor and vulnerable people, and create a new social contract that is just and inclusive. Countries should enact a global tax system that fairly taxes the wealthiest people and multinational corporations. Parliamentarians must use quotas and other tools to achieve gender parity. They must also bring to the table youth, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities.

19. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing problems and inequalities. Recovery efforts must help usher in a sustainable world. Parliamentarians should work with all stakeholders, including governments and civil society, to foster partnerships and build synergies. Countries must stop exploiting the planet's finite resources and take more decisive action to fight the climate crisis together.

20. The IPU and parliaments play a critical role in fostering multilateralism which is urgently needed to solve today's pressing global challenges.

List of Speakers

Moderator: *Ms. Anne Marie Goetz*, New York University, Center for Global Affairs

Day One

Opening session

Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Panel 1: Growing economic inequalities as a threat to sustainable development: Drivers and possible solutions

Senator Olga Maria del Carmen Sanchez Cordero, Speaker of the Senate, Mexico

H.E. Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council,
Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations

Mr. Pedro Conceicao, Director of the Human Development Report Office, United Nations
Development Programme

Prof. Ms. Jayati Ghosh, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, UN Advisory Board on
Economic and Social Affairs

Panel 2: Building on the past to improve the future: Youth inclusion and the need for inter-generational justice

H.E. Ambassador Júlio César Freire de Moraes, Permanent Representative of the Republic of
Cabo Verde to the United Nations

Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (video message)

Panel 3: Leaving no one behind: The rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups

Mr. Luis Alfredo Fratti, Speaker, House of Representatives of Uruguay

H.E. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta to the
United Nations, Chair, Economic and Financial Committee of the 76th General Assembly

Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, Head of the United
Nations Human Rights Office, New York

Ms. Beate Andrees, ILO Representative at the United Nations in New York

Day Two

Panel 4: Gender equality in decision-making as a key to sustainable recovery: The litmus test of inclusive politics

Ms. Lesia Vasylenko, MP, Parliament of Ukraine, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

H.E. Ambassador Jukka Salovaara, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

Ms. Sabine Freizer, Chief of the Leadership and Governance Section, UN Women

Mr. Gary Barker, President and CEO, Promundo

Special briefing: Parliaments at the UN, for a more effective multilateralism to address global challenges

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU

Ms. Cecilia Widegren, MP, Parliament of Sweden, Member of the Executive Committee of the IPU

H.E. Ambassador Francisco Duarte Lopes, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations, Chair of the Group of Friends of the IPU

Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Department of Political and Peacekeeping Affairs, United Nations

Panel 5: Making good on climate change commitments: The people vs. organized interests

Senator Andries Gryffroy, Senate of Belgium, Member of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs

H. E. Ambassador Peter Thomson, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Oceans (video message)

Ms. Anne-Sophie Cerisola, Director, Climate Action Team, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations

Ms. Ligia Noronha, Assistant Secretary General, Head of the New York Office, United Nations Environment Programme

Ms. Elizabeth Bast, Executive Director, Oil Change International

Closing session

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU

Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the General Assembly