

IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs
Item 6

UNC/2012/6-R.1
11 October 2012

PANEL DISCUSSION

RIO +20 IN PERSPECTIVE: WHAT HOPE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

(Thursday, 25 October 2012, 9 – 11 a.m.)

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) held in June in Rio de Janeiro was a major let-down in the face of the tremendous economic, social and environmental challenges the world is facing today. The Conference reaffirmed long-established principles and general commitments, but did very little to set out ambitious new goals and policy prescriptions.

Rio+20 offered no new and actionable recommendations on major issues such as financing for sustainable development and technology transfers to developing countries. The prescriptions provided to address urgent issues such as unemployment and growing inequalities, as well as the persistently unsustainable stress on the environment, are vaguely formulated, lack an enforcement mechanism, and skirt some of the main underlying questions. The much anticipated *green economy* vision of the Conference also left much to be desired.

In the end, the Conference's achievements were very few. They include setting the stage for a new generation of Sustainable Development Goals that would replace the current Millennium Development Goals when they expire in 2015, adopting a (voluntary) 10-year framework to make consumption and production patterns more sustainable, and creating a new High-level political forum at the United Nations that would replace the ineffective Commission for Sustainable Development.

Negotiators of the new Rio Declaration also had very little in concrete terms to say about the role of parliaments in supporting coherent sustainable development policies or in overseeing government action. They did, however, encourage all stakeholders, a term that generally includes parliaments, civil society and the private sector, to become more involved in the national and international follow up of the Conference.

However one interprets the final outcome of the UNCSD, it is clear that there is no room for complacency. If governments are at an impasse, then parliaments have an even greater responsibility to propose solutions and to work with citizens to generate the political will that is required to move the agenda forward.

Against this background, the panel will address the following main questions:

- How can the disappointing outcome of the Rio Conference be explained?
- How can parliaments support the concrete achievements of the Conference going forward?
- What can parliaments do on their own to advance sustainable development at the national level?
- How much should the IPU invest in advancing this agenda?