



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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132nd IPU Assembly

Hanoi (Viet Nam), 28 March - 1 April 2015



Standing Committee on
Sustainable Development,
Finance and Trade

C-II/132/M
15 January 2015

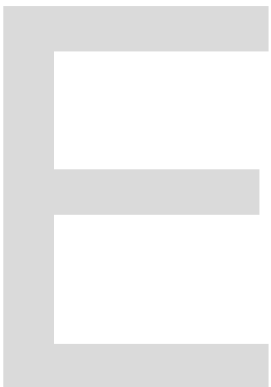
Shaping a new system of water governance: Promoting parliamentary action on water

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
Mr. I. Cassis (Switzerland) and Mr. J. Mwiimbu (Zambia)***

1. Freshwater is obviously essential to basic human needs, but also to health, food and energy production, economic development and the preservation of ecosystems. In fact, water is a core component of all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental). However, it is a limited resource for which there is no substitute, and water use has increased at more than twice the rate of the population in the past 100 years. According to UN Water, by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two thirds of the world's population could be living under water stress.
2. As a consequence, the pressure exerted on water resources by factors such as population growth, climate change, rapid urbanization, growing energy demand and lack of effective governance is steadily increasing, and competition between various user groups has escalated dramatically. This state of affairs has prompted a wide variety of institutions to become involved in water governance. The fact that they are fragmented and lack coordination has resulted in competing if not conflicting norms, principles and approaches to water governance, and this has de facto hampered effective water resources management.
3. The draft resolution prepared by the co-Rapporteurs for consideration by delegates to the 132nd IPU Assembly (Hanoi, March-April 2015) strengthens what they believe is a shared and common conviction: there is an urgent need to promote and implement a system of water governance in order to meet water challenges. This conviction was first reflected in the resolutions adopted by the 100th Inter-Parliamentary Conference (Moscow, September 1998),¹ which acknowledged that freshwater resources are essential to basic human needs, health, food production and the preservation of ecosystems, and by the 130th IPU Assembly (March 2014),² which highlighted the need to improve water management in order to prevent and mitigate high disaster risks, strengthen resilience and ultimately contribute to sustainable development.
4. According to UNDP, water governance refers to the range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to regulate the development and management of water resources and the provision of water services at different levels of society. This apparently simple definition belies the fact that water governance is much more than determining who has access to water and how. Water management implies taking into consideration numerous contemporary issues, such as equitable, non-discriminatory and sustainable access to water, environmental degradation, climate change, disaster risk reduction, poverty, sectoral competition for water use, and water-related conflicts and tensions.

¹ <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/100-2.htm>.

² <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/130/Res-2.htm>.



5. Because of the interconnected issues involved, the two co-Rapporteurs share the conviction that water governance is of global concern. In order to improve water governance, States sharing water resources need to strengthen their cooperation, notably on matters relating to international watercourses. They should also seriously consider joining international legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation³. In terms of the post-2015 development agenda, water is such an important issue that it should be the subject of a dedicated sustainable development goal, and States and parliamentarians are encouraged to advocate to that end, in order to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

6. However, while water is a global issue, the related challenges and situations vary from country to country. Specific attention therefore has to be paid to water governance at national and local level as well. The first step towards guaranteeing effective water governance is unquestionably to ensure that international treaties, customary law and resolutions related to the human right to water and sanitation and to water management and protection are appropriately implemented in national legal frameworks. Moreover, effective water governance cannot be achieved without a strong budgetary commitment, and parliamentarians are therefore encouraged to ensure that commitment is made.

7. The two co-Rapporteurs are convinced that, no matter what the context, in order to meet current challenges such as sectoral competition and sustainable use, water governance should be based on the Global Water Partnership's Integrated Water Resources Management process, which promotes coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner, without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. Similarly, the concept of water security, which UN Water defines as the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability, has to be the guiding principle of water governance everywhere.

8. Water governance implies striking a balance between competing interests and views. The two co-Rapporteurs hold what they believe is a common conviction: the human being should be at the heart of water governance. In the face of competing needs and interests, priority should be given to personal and domestic use for all, without discrimination and with a special focus on gender equity. IPU Members are encouraged to take urgent action in order to promote and implement a coherent system of water governance based on a human rights approach.

³ Examples are the [1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes](#) and the [1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses](#). The 1997 Convention entered into force in 2014 and the 1992 Convention has been open for accession since 2013 (two countries still need to accept the amendment to globalize it). The two Conventions are complementary.