

Report of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

*Noted by the 133rd IPU Assembly
(Geneva, 21 October 2015)*

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade held its sitting on 19 October 2015 with its Vice-President, Mr. O. Hav (Denmark), in the chair.

Parliamentary contribution to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference

The Committee dealt with four subjects:

- (a) Presentation of the 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study;
- (b) Information about the Parliamentary Meeting to be organized by the IPU in Paris, in December, on the occasion of the United Nations Climate Change Conference;
- (c) Exchange of views on the preliminary draft outcome document of the Parliamentary Meeting in Paris; and
- (d) Presentation of the draft Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change.

The IPU President addressed the Committee at the beginning of the debate. He expressed the hope that an agreement on climate change would be made in Paris. However, he highlighted that members of parliament had to push their governments to come up with higher ambitions to combat climate change. Another important role of parliaments was to ensure a clear, long-term pathway to achieve the national and global goals, such as the net zero emissions/climate neutrality target by 2050.

The IPU President also stressed that there was an overlap between climate change and many other Sustainable Development Goals which should be looked at and explored as countries prepared their national strategies. Such an approach would reduce the cost of countries' engagement in the Goals and would increase effectiveness.

After the President's address, the Committee heard a presentation about the 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study which had published its fifth edition this year. The study was a uniquely comprehensive review of climate change legislation throughout the world and as such, was of immense importance for parliamentarians. The IPU was closely associated with the preparation of the study and the Secretariat had sent copies to each parliament.

One of the authors of the study, Ms. A. Averchenkova (Grantham Research Institute, London) presented the study to the Committee. The study covered 98 countries plus the European Union, which taken together, produce 93 per cent of world emissions. Among other things, the study found that, since 1997, the number of climate change laws and policies had doubled every five years. Approximately half of those (398) were passed by the legislative branch, and half (408) by the executive branch (e.g. by decree). Forty-six new laws and policies were adopted in 2014, compared with 82 in 2013.

Ms. Averchenkova informed the Committee that the study included detailed country chapters with a full list of laws for each country covered, a set of country fact sheets with key indicators, and a complete database of over 800 climate-related laws. The study was intended as a source of information for legislators, researchers and policy-makers. It was hoped that parliaments considering climate change legislation would benefit from the growing body of experience reflected in the study.

After this presentation, the chair gave the floor to Mr. S. Tchelnokov (IPU Secretariat) to brief the Committee on the Parliamentary Meeting that the IPU would organize in Paris in conjunction with the United Nations conference on climate change. Mr. Tchelnokov explained that a two-day Parliamentary Meeting would be organized jointly by the IPU and the French Parliament as the only official parliamentary activity held in conjunction with the United Nations conference. A practical information note on the Meeting, its registration form and provisional programme were posted on the IPU website. The Parliamentary Meeting would be open to parliamentarians attending the United Nations session as members of official national delegations or in any other capacity, such as observers representing civil society organizations.

One of the outcomes of the Parliamentary Meeting should be the adoption of a declaration. Its preliminary draft was prepared by the rapporteur of the Parliamentary Meeting, Mr. H. Maurey (France). The chair invited Mr. Maurey to explain to the Committee the main concepts and ideas behind his text. He then invited the Committee to provide the rapporteur with comments and ideas that he could use in his further work on the text.

Mr. Maurey highlighted that parliamentarians had an essential role to play in contributing to the success of policies to combat climate disruption. Among other things, his draft document tried to encourage parliamentarians to search for innovative solutions in all areas concerning climate change – adaptation, mitigation and financing. Improving the level of knowledge of climate change among parliamentarians, including through peer education, should be promoted. Finally, the draft document committed to ensure that questions related to climate disruption were systematically included on the agenda of inter-parliamentary meetings and that the outcome document of the Parliamentary Meeting would be attached to the Final Acts of the United Nations conference.

Fifteen delegations took the opportunity to comment on to Mr. Maurey's presentation. They largely expressed agreement with the current text but highlighted that the outcome should be more action-oriented. The chair encouraged everyone to submit additional input and amendments by 15 November so that they could be incorporated and presented to the Parliamentary Meeting in Paris.

The chair then invited Mr. Tchelnokov to present the draft Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change that the IPU is preparing under the leadership of its President. Mr. Tchelnokov explained that the Parliamentary Meeting in Paris would also be an opportunity to advance consultations on this strategic document that should guide IPU's climate-related work after Paris. Due to lack of time it was not possible to make a full presentation of the action plan to the Committee. Mr. Tchelnokov therefore invited everyone to consult the draft on the IPU website and provide comments, reflections and input. The action plan would be finalized after the Paris conference and presented to the 134th IPU Assembly in Lusaka for adoption.

Debate on Ensuring lasting protection against destruction and deterioration for the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of humanity

This debate was organized around the theme of the future Committee resolution, expected to be adopted at the 134th Assembly in Lusaka. The purpose of the debate was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to exchange views about challenges that stand in the way of ensuring lasting protection of the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity. The debate would also provide the co-rapporteurs with initial information about how IPU Member Parliaments might approach this issue.

The debate was chaired by Mr. A. Destexhe (Belgium), co-rapporteur. Mr. Giovanni Boccardi (Culture Sector Chief of Unit, UNESCO), also made a presentation to the Committee.

Mr. Boccardi provided background information about the definition of cultural heritage and how it had evolved over time. He pointed out the importance of community engagement in deciding what is heritage and how to preserve it. Mr. Boccardi briefed the Committee about the status of some heritage sites in current conflict areas and warned that the situation was deteriorating. He also stressed the critical link between cultural heritage and sustainable development for communities and societies at large.

Mr. Boccardi drew the Committee's attention to existing conventions and other instruments of cooperation in the area of cultural heritage. While instruments of implementation were well developed, effective implementation itself was lacking in some areas. He called the Committee to work towards a resolution that would call for further ratifications and implementation of these instruments, highlighting the specific roles that parliaments played in this process.

Mr. Destexhe took the floor after Mr. Boccardi and presented to the Committee his vision about the content and recommendations of the resolution. He identified nine challenges to the protection and preservation of cultural heritage: mass tourism, armed conflict and terrorism, looting and illicit trade, population growth and urbanization, lack of awareness, restoration, globalization, climate change, and lack of sufficient documentation by some countries. In each of these areas, he developed a number of recommendations on how parliaments could help overcome the current obstacles to better protection of cultural heritage. Mr. Destexhe invited the Committee to consult his preliminary note on the subject, which was posted on the IPU website.

In the debate that followed, 20 delegations took part. Most of them shared the good practices that their countries had put in place to protect cultural heritage. Several delegations provided concrete examples of laws and policies that their parliaments had developed in this area. Some pointed out that attempts to impose a way of life on communities and societies should also be viewed as a threat to cultural heritage.

Several parliamentarians argued that the resolution should encourage countries to include new generations in the protection of cultural heritage through educational programmes in schools and other settings. The role of parliaments in ensuring support to relevant institutions and cooperation across sectors was raised. Strong references were made to the importance of seeing identities and belonging as part of cultural heritage.

Elections to the Bureau

The Committee also held elections to fill the existing vacancies on the Committee Bureau. Five vacant posts were filled by the African Group, Asia-Pacific Group and GRULAC, respectively. The Committee was informed that one Bureau member from the Arab Group and one from the Twelve Plus Group would no longer be able to participate in the work of the Bureau and those members were therefore replaced by other parliamentarians from the same countries who would serve the remainder of the former members' terms. Two vacant posts for the Eurasia Group remained unfilled. In accordance with the decision made at the Joint Meeting of Chairs of the Geopolitical Groups and Standing Committee Presidents on 17 October, the Committee President will be elected at the next IPU Assembly in Zambia.

The Committee approved the Bureau's proposal to dedicate time to discussing the resolution. Should time allow, a panel debate could also be organized.