



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Speech by the IPU President, Hon. Saber Chowdhury

Inaugural session of the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of COP20/CMP10

Lima, Peru, 8 December 2014

Madam President of the Peruvian Congress of the Republic,
Madam Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on
Climate Change,
His Excellency, Minister of the Environment of Peru,
President of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean of the IPU,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are fortunate to be meeting here this morning in the magnificent setting of the "Palacio Legislativo", in the historical center of Lima and let me begin by cordially thanking our Peruvian hosts. We are privileged to enjoy the hospitality of the Peruvian people.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the President of the Congress, Ms. Ana María Solórzano Flores, and – through her – to all parliamentary colleagues and staff who have worked relentlessly to prepare this event. *Gracias por hacernos sentir como en casa... O mejor aún.*

A few weeks ago, at the opening of the Climate Summit in New York, the UN Secretary-General, observed: "The human, environmental and financial cost of climate change is fast becoming unbearable. [...] To ride this storm, we need all hands on deck". Climate change is indeed the defining challenge that confronts the world today.

We, as parliamentarians from every corner of the world, have put aside all affairs and travelled to Lima. For two weeks, this city has become the capital of international climate diplomacy.

At our meeting, we have two personalities whose role in the negotiations is absolutely crucial. The UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Ms. Figueres, and the COP20/CMP10 President, Minister Pulgar-Vidal, carry on their shoulders the bulk of the responsibility for a positive outcome from the Lima session. It is indeed a heavy burden as this outcome will to a large extent determine the future we will have and hopefully this will indeed be the future we want and deserve.

I wish to express our deep appreciation of the fact that in spite of being very busy at the UN Conference, they have agreed to meet with legislators assembled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union for a parliamentary dialogue on climate change.

The IPU is a unique organization. It is celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2014. Its membership embraces 166 legislatures comprising 43,500 parliamentarians who in turn represent 6.5 billion people.

At the IPU, we recognize and firmly believe that legislators bear their own share of responsibility for tackling climate change.

We are duty-bound to enact and amend laws, approve national budgets and hold governments to account. Unless transposed into national legislation followed by robust oversight, international agreements on climate change will be neither credible nor effective.

The IPU supports the view that bold action driven by high levels of ambition, duly realized, is an imperative to reduce emissions, strengthen climate resilience and mobilize political will to avoid the far-ranging and disastrous consequences of climate change.

2015 is a very significant year for UN processes that include the new Hyogo Framework for Action as well the Sustainable Development Goals to succeed the MDGs. How the new climate change agreement and these agreements mutually reinforce each other will be important for sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

Copenhagen was my first exposure to the COP process and we had a similar parliamentary event then at the Danish Parliament. Expectations were high, the momentum seemed to be building and yet it ended in disarray as we failed to agree to a new protocol as a successor to Kyoto that was agreed in COP3 in 1997. COP20 here in Lima marks well over two decades of global negotiations to tackle the challenge of human-induced climate change and we need to break the impasse.

During these twenty years of this international process emissions have in fact gone up and runaway climate change is now as real a possibility as ever.

Madam Executive Secretary is on record as having said that Lima would be the key litmus test of the engagement and ambition of the Parties. Expectations are high, the stakes even more so.

The UNFCCC must pass this test. After all, we only have one planet and there can be no Plan B. As we attempt to script towards an agreement in COP21 in Paris next year, there is some cause for optimism.

First, the science driving the roadmap drawn up by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calling for a 40 to 70 per cent drop in emissions in the next forty years relative to 2010 levels - with a move to zero by the end of the century – is powerful. The science of climate change has produced its starkest warning yet.

Secondly, I sense a change in the strategic approach to the negotiations in that we are no longer trying to wrap all the items into one big package on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is and as everything was not agreed, nothing was achieved despite the high-level segment negotiations.

Thirdly, the USA and China are now positively engaged in climate change as evidenced by the recent joint statement of President Xi and President Obama. The impasse between the two has been a big factor behind the stalling of past negotiations has now hopefully been overcome.

Having said that, I will add a note of caution – despite the pledges made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by all the countries, we are still looking at a four degree Celsius-level of global warming, a far cry from the 1.5 degree-level considered critical by many.

Although national pledges for the Green Climate Change Fund have surpassed US\$ 9 billion and this is welcome news, we are presently well short of previously vowed goal of US\$ 100 billion per annum by 2020.

How the funds from developed countries are allocated for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries is an important matter to flag. Currently, the split is 9:1 in favour of mitigation in the larger developing countries such as China, India, Brazil and Indonesia.

LDCs and vulnerable countries will be seeking a more balanced mix between mitigation and adaptation, with the latter focused on the poorest and most vulnerable developing countries.

Trust between the Parties and strong political will manifested in high ambition levels is at the heart of and key to success in this complex negotiating marathon. Heads of Governments in particular must rise to the challenge by looking well beyond their immediate terms of office and do what is right and just for tomorrow and the day after.

Our intention and objective is to use the constitutional leverage vested in parliamentary institutions and us as mandated representatives of the people to influence, shape and provide critical input in the designing of the Agreement before it lands in our parliaments for ratification.

As legislators, we want a meaningful, universal and legally binding agreement to emerge from the UNFCCC negotiations. Together with other stakeholders, we continue to insist upon the politically, operationally and legally binding nature of the new climate accord.

Political leaders and decision-makers, including legislators, must act decisively and act now and we will all have failed our future generations and this planet, our only home, if we do not.

The window of opportunity to stay within less than 2 degrees of global warming is closing fast. If we fail to plan, we plan to fail.

We urge government negotiators to flesh out the essential elements of the core agreement here, in Lima. All facets must be treated in a balanced manner and these include among others, mitigation, adaptation, finance, carbon pricing, technology transfer, capacity building and transparency of action. It is also necessary to identify a range of tools that can be used at various scales and levels, including the international, regional, national and sub-national.

Action to combat climate change comes at a cost but the cost-benefit ratio in terms of benefits of action and the cost of inaction is overwhelming and empirically and conclusively established.

We shall have ample opportunities to discuss these and other questions in the course of our deliberations today, the agenda for which is very rich and wide-ranging.

In a few minutes, President of COP20/CMP10, Minister Pulgar-Vidal, will update us on the state of play in the intergovernmental talks taking place a few kilometers from here and also share his expectations.

Next, we will have an interactive panel discussion on the issue of historical and new inequalities resulting from climate-related processes. The entire planet is affected by the consequences of climate change and yet different countries, regions, industries, infrastructure elements and groups of population are exposed to it unequally. Some are clearly more vulnerable than others.

This issue is very sensitive because it must be taken in the context of historical responsibilities, national circumstances, geopolitical realities and security considerations. It is highly political and this is all the more reason why the subject is appropriate for the parliamentary audience.

In the afternoon, we shall start with a presentation on the findings of the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. As you know, this recently published Report includes more than 5,000 pages of analysis on the science, impacts and action required on climate change and we have invited leading experts from the World Meteorological Organization to present a summary on the findings of the Report so that we are informed and empowered to act.

The concluding panel appropriately has to do with concerted action by national legislators, subnational governments and local authorities in providing adequate regulatory responses to the challenge of climate change. Together with our partners from ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, we want to explore prospects for mobilizing new coalitions to accelerate climate action.

I see our advancement in this direction as an integral part of the Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change – an initiative that I would like the IPU to pursue with a view to adding value to the global climate advocacy. It is high time for parliaments and their world organization, the IPU, to galvanize their climate-related political input, participation, legislative follow-up and oversight.

At the end of our deliberations, I hope we can reach a consensus on the outcome document, the draft of which was prepared by a member of the Peruvian Congress, Mr. Sergio Tejada.

The proposed text sends a clear and focused message from the global parliamentary community to government negotiators and gives us something to build upon as we go home to our parliaments.

When we meet in Paris next year, we should be in a position - each and every one of us - to report on the normative and policy steps that we have taken in our respective parliaments in support of low-carbon, energy-efficient development and climate-resilient societies.

It is my hope that our debates will be candid, productive and rich in the true parliamentary tradition.

With these words, it is my pleasure to pass the floor to the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Ms. Christiana Figueres.

Thank you once again for being with us today and I wish you excellent deliberations. I do look forward to your support and active engagement over the next 12 months as the IPU assumes leadership and a heightened profile in this important discourse.