



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

Check against delivery

Speech by the IPU President, Hon. Saber Chowdhury

Inaugural session of the Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of COP21/CMP11

Paris, France, 5 December 2015

His Excellency Ban Ki Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Hon. Presidents of the French National Assembly and the French Senate,
His Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of France,
Hon. Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliaments, Fellow parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamalaikum and a very good afternoon..

A very warm welcome to you all. Thank you for joining this Parliamentary Meeting jointly organized by the two houses of the French Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Let me also express my thanks and appreciation to our French hosts for the arrangements.

Paris is the city where the IPU was born – 126 years back in 1889. France is a founding member of the IPU. I have come here from Budapest where we just commemorated 120 years of the Hungary IPU Group. I was deeply honoured to address a special session of the Hungarian Assembly as part of the festivities. Hungary is also a founding Member of the IPU.

Inspired by the timeless values of liberty, equality and fraternity, our distinguished 126-year history is studded with instances of the global parliamentary community working together, taking advantage of the IPU as a unique space and platform for open dialogue, promoting ground breaking initiatives and mooted ideas that were ahead of their times.

So whether it be in inventing multilateral cooperation, playing an important role in the coming into being of the League of Nations in 1919, the setting up of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, facilitating the first meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev, in recent times engaging as constitutionally mandated representatives of people with the UN for a people-centric Agenda 2030, IPU has been in the forefront.

Our leadership and engagement is particularly called for once again as 2015 comes to a close. This has been the most important year yet for UN processes as we strive to steer the world towards a safer, more prosperous and sustainable future and to get it right for our only planet. And let's remember, we do not have a Planet B. Our role as parliamentarians in delivering this most aspirational and challenging of agendas is critical. And climate change is of course fundamental to it.

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, whom we have the great honor of welcoming among us today, is on record as having stated that he has made the fight against climate change his personal priority. Mr. Secretary-General, we share this priority with you.

Like you, we want to safeguard ourselves and future generations from climate chaos. We want a greener and a safer planet, advancing along a path of sustainable carbon-neutral development. We want to prevent climate-induced disasters, the depletion of biodiversity and waves of migration. And we want to ensure that poverty belongs to the museum of the past.

On behalf of the entire global parliamentary community embodied by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, for having shared your vision with us today.

The IPU embraces 167 legislatures comprising 43,500 parliamentarians who in turn represent 6.5 billion people. We have heard your message, Mr. Secretary-General. We will make sure that it not only reaches our constituencies but that we also lead and play our role.

For two weeks in December 2015, Paris has become the climate capital of the world. UN climate talks have never been a stress-free process. But the ongoing COP21 session is an all-time peak in terms of the need to raise levels of ambition, act with greater urgency, take more responsibility and demonstrate stronger political courage and leadership.

The spotlight is also on COP21 President, Minister Laurent Fabius. We know how hard he has worked for the success of this conference: travelling from capital to capital, generating innovative ideas, striving for compromises between hard-to-reconcile positions. We hope it will lead to the outcome we all want as failure here in Paris is not an option.

If we fail, we will be failing not just ourselves but also future generations.

We are very grateful to Minister Fabius for having found the time in his extremely busy schedule to join us on the premises of the National Assembly, a building he knows very well, as he was the Assembly President here for many years.

France's institutions of legislative and executive power are woven in a delicate fabric of checks and balances. The never-ending search for solutions through political dialogue, compromise and persuasion are at the very heart of this vibrant democracy.

To see Paris, the capital of a country with deeply rooted democratic traditions, being attacked by terrorists, shocked and saddened us all. I take this opportunity to convey to our French hosts our deepest feelings of sympathy and solidarity. The global parliamentary community shares the pain of the French nation. More than ever, our common humanity must stand tall and strong.

Let me express our sincere gratitude to both chambers of the French Parliament and personally to their Presidents, Mr. Bartolone and Mr. Larcher, for having insisted on the need to maintain this Parliamentary Meeting, despite the tragic events of 13 November.

This is a powerful instance of legislators demonstrating courage and commitment. No, we shall not be diverted from our objective to make this planet a better place to live. No, we shall not turn our backs on the ideals of democracy, dialogue, mutual respect, human security and dignity. Yes, we shall continue working for peace, development and the well-being of the people. And yes, we shall spare no effort to fight climate change.

Solidarity to act on climate change was reassuringly expressed time and again in speeches of Heads of State and government during the Leaders Event in Le Bourget a few days ago. One after another, they pledged to decarbonize their economies and phase out greenhouse gas emissions.

Yet, as we were reminded today, a Paris Agreement on climate change would be not the end but only the beginning of a long road to both a zero-carbon society and to living within planetary boundaries.

At the IPU, we firmly believe that legislators bear their own share of responsibility for tackling climate change. We have stressed all along that parliamentarians 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. As Parliamentarians we can breathe life into these agreements and ensure they deliver.

The IPU continues to call for bold climate action driven by high levels of national ambition to reduce emissions, so as to strengthen climate resilience and avoid far-ranging consequences. Together with other stakeholders, we continue to insist upon the politically, operationally and legally binding nature of the new climate accord.

Our Member Parliaments stand ready not only to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement, but also to facilitate bottom-up national action through legislation. There is no time to lose. Rather than wait for global consensus and agreements, we need to do our bit at the national level and push the envelope as much and as far as we can.

From a broader perspective, we stand for harmonizing the global agenda by promoting greater coherence and complementarity between the new agreements on disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change.

It is critical to recognize the mutually reinforcing and interlocking nature of these agreements. Otherwise, we will not be able to guarantee optimal use of available resources. Neither shall we be able to work effectively with the many actors involved in the implementation process at the local, national and global levels.

Action to combat climate change has financial implications. But the overwhelming benefits of action, as opposed to the costs of inaction, have been empirically and conclusively established.

During our two-day meeting, we shall have ample opportunities to discuss these and other topical questions relating to climate change. Indeed, the program of our meeting is rich and wide-ranging, while the lineup of guest speakers is as good as it gets.

In a few minutes, we shall have the pleasure of listening to a presentation by one of the most recognizable champions of climate action, former Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger. He is also the Founding Chair of an organization called R20 – Regions of Climate Action. It is in this capacity that he will address us today.

We shall then hold a parliamentary advocacy session to discuss priorities for legislative action on climate change. The IPU has elaborated its own Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change, the main purpose of which is to galvanize climate-related political input, participation, follow-up and oversight by parliaments during the implementation stage of the Paris Agreement.

When we met in Lima last year, I expressed hope that in Paris we would be in a position to report on the normative and policy steps taken in our respective parliaments in support of low-carbon, energy-efficient development and climate-resilient societies. This is exactly what we would like to discuss during the parliamentary advocacy session today. In addition, we want to use it to engage with IPU partners from among inter-parliamentary organizations that are actively involved in climate action.

Tomorrow, we shall start the day with a series of presentations by such key figures in global climate politics as French Minister of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy Ms. Ségolène Royal; Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner; and OECD Secretary-General, Mr. Angel Gurría. I am sure you will have many questions for them.

Next, we will have an interactive panel discussion, bringing together parliamentarians and renowned climate scientists. Our distinguished guests will include the new Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Mr. Hoesung Lee, the head of the World Meteorological Organization, Mr. Michel Jarraud, and Lord Stern, an outstanding authority on Climate Change.

"Climate science has spoken, now is the time for legislative action" - this is how I would capture the thrust and focus of this panel. We cannot ignore, however, that climate sceptics also exist – whether out of convenience or flawed belief. And so, let us listen to the arguments that today's most advanced science has to offer.

As Parliamentarians, we should be particularly attentive to the needs and aspirations of those groups that are more vulnerable to climate change than others. This is why we have included in the program a session focusing on the social aspects of climate policy-making, with particular emphasis on gender and youth. I thank the recently-created IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians for promoting this particular theme.

In the same vein, another of our panels brings together legislators, business representatives from the energy sector, and environmental activists. The idea is to have a wide ranging discussion about renewable energy.

Effective climate action is impossible without the active involvement of all stakeholders. To add new dimensions and wider perspectives to our discussion, we have invited two extraordinary women, Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO and Ms. Mary Robinson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Climate Change. I am confident that their insights will significantly enrich our understanding and contribute immensely to the substance of the debate.

At the end of our deliberations, I hope we can reach consensus on the outcome document, drafted by French Senator, Mr. Hervé Maurey. The proposed text sends a clear political message to government negotiators and is also a rallying call to action for our global parliamentary community. Importantly, it will give us all something to build upon as we go home to our parliaments and start implementing the Paris decisions.

It is my hope that our debates will be frank, focused and productive – true to best parliamentary traditions. I now have the pleasure in declaring our Parliamentary Meeting open.