



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

## **2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20): IPU contribution to the first draft outcome document**

Geneva, 31 October 2011

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

I am writing in response to your call for submissions to the first draft outcome document of next year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

The IPU contributed to the 1992 Rio Summit and its follow-up conference in Johannesburg in 2002. Over the years, the organization has raised awareness in parliaments, organized debates and adopted resolutions touching on virtually all aspects of the original Agenda 21. Only last week, the IPU debated sustainable development issues during the 125<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Bern, Switzerland.

The views that follow draw from those processes as well as submissions received directly from parliaments in view of the present global consultation. They are organized along the two main themes of next year's conference.

1/ The green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication:

- The green economy is a useful concept. It can help propel forward many of the objectives of sustainable development in an integrated manner. It needs to be compatible with the larger policy framework that must underpin the sustainable development agenda for poverty eradication. This includes policies that aim at achieving full employment, guaranteeing basic rights to health, education and livelihood, managing population growth and movements, reducing inequalities, containing stress on natural resources and preserving the environment. The document of the Rio+20 Conference should therefore affirm a commitment to these policies as part of the new green economy paradigm.
- To succeed, green economy policy prescriptions will need to aim at the *dematerialization* of the economy, beginning in high-consumption developed countries. A gradual shift is required away from energy/resource intensive material production and consumption toward education, culture, and leisure activities as equally worthwhile objectives of human development. The green economy must be less focused on growth and pay more attention to redistribution and rationalization of resources and incomes within countries and globally. The green economy will only succeed if it achieves a decoupling – on a global scale – of economic growth from environmental impacts.

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**H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe and H.E. Mr. Sook Kim**

**Co-Chairs, UNCSD preparatory process**

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**United Nations, New York**

- Though requiring a strong national policy framework, the green economy must also be grounded at the community level through the involvement of local authorities. National and local governments must work together to forge a coherent and mutually reinforcing policy environment. Urban planning that facilitates public transport, renewable energy solutions, recycling and reusing by industry and consumers etc. at the local level will be key components of the green economy in developed and developing countries alike.
- The green economy must not be confined to developed countries that possess the required means of implementation. It must be a global phenomenon that includes developing countries while respecting the key principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. This will require more and better official aid, technology transfers through both private and public sector support, and a significant strengthening of the international legal regime (trade, finance, etc.).
- The green economy presents a risk of over-reliance on technological solutions. While green technologies and green production methods will have a key role, their application and overall effect on sustainable development will need to be carefully evaluated to avoid risks to food security, human health and other social concerns. The positive impact of green technologies will also greatly depend on an equitable distribution of ownership rights between developed and developing countries. Key productive assets like land will need to be carefully managed to avoid excessive concentration in a few large entities.

2/ The institutional framework for sustainable development:

- The current global architecture does not sufficiently integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development across the full spectrum of UN bodies, programmes, agencies, and international conventions. There is clearly a need for a reordering within the UN system as well as the UN inter-governmental machinery, beginning with the functional commissions of ECOSOC.
- The global normative framework for sustainable development should be linked better to national decision-making processes. Any new UN architecture for sustainable development should make it possible to include national parliaments in the design and implementation of global commitments. If a new inter-governmental body is created, it should consider a multi-stakeholder format similar (as a basic model) to that of the Development Cooperation Forum of ECOSOC. Parliaments should be clearly identified in the outcome document as key to the implementation of all policies for sustainable development.
- The Rio conference should provide further impetus to institutional reforms at the national level. Experience, so far, shows that little progress has been made within parliaments to mainstream sustainable development. The same applies to the executive branch where ministries continue to operate in silos without sufficient coordinating structures. This integration is critical to the design and implementation of sound national strategies for sustainable development.
- The Rio conference should encourage all countries (with regard for relative national capacities) to adopt *green budgets*. As the key tool of policy making, the budget document and related processes can be at the center of the institutional and societal transformation required for the integration of all three pillars of sustainable development. At a minimum, green budgets would incorporate from the start a full

valuation of the social and environmental costs of government expenditures as well as a complete accounting of natural resources and related ecosystem services.

- An important adjunct to green budgets may be the institution of *green GDP* measurements which would reflect the net effect of economic growth on the natural environment. To help generate a momentum toward green budgets the UN and related organizations, could adopt a common global standard and establish capacity building programs to help member states acquire the required technical capacities.

The IPU recognizes the importance of the Rio+20 Conference. It offers a unique opportunity for the global community to chart a new course for the future of the planet. Humanity is living beyond the carrying capacity of the earth while billions of people remain excluded from social and economic progress. The political will to adopt necessary reforms is often lacking, with short-term imperatives all too easily trumping long-term concerns. Nothing short of a total re-think of the entire incentive system that drives social, economic and environmental development will be required to set the earth on a more sustainable course.

The IPU looks forward to the negotiations of the draft outcome document as an opportunity to further engage with the United Nations on all of these issues.

I wish you and your colleagues every success with the difficult task ahead.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders B. Johansson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anders B. Johansson