



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

31 October 2014

Excellency,

I am pleased to invite you to this year's Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations entitled *Ensuring a people-centred approach to the new SDGs: A shared responsibility*, which will take place in the ECOSOC Chamber on 19 and 20 November.

The Hearing is jointly organized by the *Inter-Parliamentary Union* (IPU) and the United Nations, under the aegis of the President of the General Assembly. In accordance with Resolution 68/272, on *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union*, the Hearing is an opportunity for Member States "to work regularly with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in facilitating a parliamentary component to major United Nations conferences."

This year, the Hearing will focus on putting people at the center of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the attendant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will examine the responsibilities that governments and parliaments share. As indicated in the attached programme, the Hearing will provide an opportunity for Members of Parliament to share their views on the SDGs before the start of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda in the coming months. The involvement of Parliaments at this early stage will also help ensure political support for the implementation of SDGs after they are adopted.

To allow for greater dynamism, all sessions will be conducted in interview style by experienced journalists. Regardless of whether Parliamentarians from your country will be in attendance, you would be encouraged to engage with participants with questions or comments.

To confirm your participation, kindly inform the Office of the Permanent Observer of the Inter-Parliamentary Union at ny-office@ipu.org. Updates on the programme of the Hearing can be found online at <http://ipu.org/splz-e/UNGA14.htm>.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam K. Kutesa", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sam K. Kutesa

To All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



Inter-Parliamentary Union
for democracy for everyone

Ensuring a people-centred approach to the new SDGs: a shared responsibility



Annual Parliamentary Hearing
United Nations Headquarters
ECOSOC Chamber, Secretariat Building
19-20 November 2014

Provisional Programme

Each session will feature a panel composed of a parliamentarian, a Permanent Representative, a high level UN official, and an expert from civil society or academia. Panels will be moderated in interview style by a journalist. Panel members will be confirmed a few days before the event.

Session I	Nov. 19	9:30 am - 1:15 pm
Official opening: the draft Sustainable Development Goals		9:30 - 10:00
<i>Welcome remarks from the leadership: UN and IPU</i>	H.E. Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations Hon. Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union	
Putting people first: the right to development for all		10:00 - 12:15 pm
<i>Background documents:*</i>	Development thinking has evolved over the last few decades from a focus on satisfying basic needs to one based on human rights. The rights-based approach puts people at the centre of the development process and makes it clear that the satisfaction of needs is not merely a responsibility of people themselves but that it involves an obligation for States.	
<i>The Quito Communiqué (128th IPU Assembly)</i>		
<i>Report of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (12 August 2014 - A/68/970)</i>	States have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights, including the economic, social and cultural rights as well as the civil and political rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties. This is also reflected in the Declaration on the Right to Development, which defines people's right to development "as an inalienable right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized."	
<i>TST Issue Brief: Human rights including the right to development (OHCHR, UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, UNEP)</i>		
<i>UN Declaration on the Right to Development (4 December 1986)</i>	At the policy level, the State's human rights obligations entail a shared responsibility between governments as initiators and implementers of policy, and parliaments as law-making and oversight bodies. It requires facilitating people's access to education, health care, political participation - to mention a few fundamental human rights - but also working to ensure that outcomes are up to the highest standard possible in terms of quality and fairness for all, without discrimination. Among other things, the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development talks about "equality of opportunity", "fair distribution of income" and of the need for national development policies to "aim at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals."	
<i>*All documents available on the IPU website at http://www.ipu.org/Sp/z-e/unga14.htm</i>		
Translating this framework into concrete policy at the national level and		

ensuring the effective implementation of the new SDGs will be no easy task. For starters, the SDGs themselves must be shaped from a human rights-based perspective. Policies to implement the SDGs will need to look at human needs more holistically and in an interconnected way. This will require, among other things, tailoring policy to the most vulnerable and other marginalized groups that are lagging behind, even though the country as a whole may appear to be flourishing. Issues like poverty cannot be reduced narrowly to an income definition alone.

The universal rights-based model, applying to both developed and developing countries, is well suited to a global agenda such as the SDGs. It should have particular traction in those affluent societies where basic needs are already satisfied or easily within reach.

Keynote speaker:

Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, United Nations

Leading questions

What are the implications of the rights-based approach for the new SDGs as a universal agenda?

How can all countries adopt the rights-based approach taking into account different stages of development, from the poorest to the most affluent societies?

How can policy effectively differentiate to target the most vulnerable, and what tools would be required?

How can governments and parliaments work together to fulfil States' human rights obligations?

Interviewees

H.E. Mrs. Sofia Mesquita Borges, Permanent Representative of Timor-Leste to the United Nations [tbc]

Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Ms. Amina Mohammed, Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning

Mr. Philip G. Alston, UN Human Right Council as its Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

Member of Parliament [tbd]

Moderator

Ms. Julia Taylor-Kennedy, broadcast journalist, Carnegie Institute

UN action for development: how does it work?

12:15 – 1:15

This special segment is intended to help MPs familiarize with the development work of the United Nations at both political and operational levels. It will provide an overview of the UN inter-governmental structure as well as of UN programme work within countries. It will feature in particular the Economic and Social Council as a central decision-making and coordination body, explaining its methods of work and overall role within the larger UN machinery. The work of the UN Development Group and of the UN system at the country level will also be presented.

Presenters

H.E. Mr. Martin Sajdik, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council

Hon. Jane Stewart, Special Representative and Director of the International

Labour Organization's office in New York

Moderator

Hon. Paddy Torsney, Permanent Observer, Inter-Parliamentary Union

Session II

Nov. 19

3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Making markets work for people: regulations and safeguards

*Background documents:**

The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order and an assessment of the implications of inequality for development (Secretary-General report, A/67/394)

World Social Protection Report 2014-15: building economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice (ILO, September 2014)

Working for the Few: political capture and economic inequality (Oxfam, January 2014)

*All documents available on the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/unga14.htm>

It is incumbent on States as “principal duty bearers” to make sure that appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks are in place to support all human rights. While governments have no obligation to provide for all people *directly*, governments must be the guarantors of the final outcome, particularly when this is dependent on market mechanisms driven by their own internal dynamics.

The global financial and economic crisis of 2008 clearly showed that markets are not self-regulating and that regulations need to be in place to maintain stability and prevent economic downturns that always hit the poor and most vulnerable the most. When market-based approaches are preferred – such as the privatization of essential services like water, education or health care - their effectiveness needs to be put to a human rights test. If some people are left out because services are unaffordable to them, then policy-makers must intervene.

More broadly, governments have a responsibility to take pro-active measures against unemployment and other social ills that undermine development progress. Austerity policies driven by a concern with budget deficits may meet the requirements of financial markets but also damage the real economy on which people depend. In any case, where austerity is necessary it should be applied fairly and with the needs of the most vulnerable in mind. As agencies like the ILO have argued, a social protection floor (basic income security, basic health care etc.) is possible in every country at any stage of development.

Another important consideration, given the sustainability problems of our time as well as increasing evidence that there are “limits to growth”, is the need to formulate economic policies that put people’s well-being first without positing growth as the overarching goal (particularly in affluent societies). A strong regulatory framework of the economy will increasingly need to integrate this perspective.

Leading questions

What regulations are needed to ensure that markets work for the people?

What policies can countries at all stages of development implement to support essential safety nets?

Are austerity policies always justified during an economic downturn and how can they be tailored to protect the most vulnerable?

Interviewees

Hon. Fernando Bustamante, Member of Parliament, Ecuador [*tbc*]

H.E. Mr. Fernando Carrera Castro, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations

High-level UN official [*tbd*]

Ms. Kate McKee, Senior Adviser, Consultative Group to Assist the Poor [*tbc*]

Moderator

Ms. Julia Taylor-Kennedy, broadcast journalist, Carnegie Institute

Reception for MPs and Ambassadors
IPU Office, Uganda House, 336 East 45th Street (10th floor)

5:45 – 7:30

Session III

Nov. 20

10:00 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

Inequality and discrimination: the development impacts, and ways to reverse the tide

*Background documents:**

The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order and an assessment of the implications of inequality for development (Secretary-General report, A/67/394)

Report of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (12 August 2014 - A/68/970)

Working for the Few: political capture and economic inequality (Oxfam, January 2014)

**All documents available on the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/unga14.htm>*

A potential innovation in the new framework of the SDGs is Goal 10 “to reduce inequality within and among countries.” One target within this goal would “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this regards.”

There is in fact abundant evidence that discriminatory laws and practices have a direct impact on people’s well-being and on development outcome as a whole. The growing problem of economic inequality, for example, can be linked in several countries to the denial of workers’ rights, such as the right to form unions and generally to bargain for better conditions of work. This is one factor explaining why in many countries wages have consistently lagged behind productivity gains, resulting in lower incomes to support demand as well as in more wealth being concentrated in a few hands.

Violence and discrimination against women, including the denial of access to and rights over land, inheritance and property for women is another illustration of this pernicious problem. This kind of discrimination often springs from cultural norms, values and traditions with deep roots in the social fabric of a country. The immediate result is that women are prevented from starting or developing an income generating activity that would help provide for themselves and their families. This in turns leads to lower productivity and revenue.

Yet another illustration of how well-being and development can be undermined occurs in the situation of discriminatory legislation relating to HIV/AIDS. Such legislation limits access to testing and treatment, which in turn impacts negatively on public health. This is an area where the IPU and the UN have been working closely together to bring about positive change.

Keynote speaker:

(tbd)

Leading questions

Why are discriminatory laws that violate human rights and hamper development so hard to eliminate?

What should be the attitude of the international community to support legal reforms that does not result in conditionality?

What can be done to strengthen solidarity among people so that all will see the benefit of eliminating exclusion and discrimination?

Interviewees

Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Parliament, Uganda *[tbc]*

H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos Mendoza-García, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to

the United Nations

Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women [tbc]

Ms. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Vice Chair of UN Committee on Development Policy

Moderator

Ms. Nermeen Shaikh, broadcast journalist, Democracy Now!

Session IV

Nov. 20

2:30 p.m. – 5:45p.m.

The My World facility: a dynamic tool for MPs-constituents interaction

2:30 – 2:50

Presentation by the Director of the UN Millennium Campaign

Monitoring and accountability for the SDGs: empowering people and institutions

2:50 – 5:00

*Background documents:**

*Delivering the post-2015
Development Agenda:
opportunities at the
national and local levels (UN
Development Group,
September 2014)*

**All documents available on
the IPU website at
[http://www.ipu.org/Splz-
e/unga14.htm](http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/unga14.htm)*

Like the MDGs, the SDGs will need to be carefully monitored at both national and global levels. While at the global level monitoring tends to be limited to tracking progress and providing guidance, at the national level – where governments are sovereign - monitoring is directly linked to accountability.

Parliaments are of course the primary institution of accountability. However, at the end of the day parliaments too must always respond to the people. Making the SDGs people-centred also means ensuring that people from all walks of life have a say into the policy process and are able to demand corrective action from decision-makers in both governments and parliaments. The exponential growth of information technologies is leading to new ways for people to participate in development planning and budget-making processes. At the same time, there is still considerable scope for conventional methods of citizens' participation to be strengthened.

Data collection and analysis is the key building block of monitoring as it provides the information for rights holders and the institutions of accountability, such as parliaments, human rights councils, audit institutions and others, to assess the impact of policy. As we learned from the MDGs experience, many countries are still unable to produce quality data to track progress on basic indicators. In addition, data provided directly by citizens is often not seen as legitimate and therefore not mainstreamed into the policy process. The adoption of a rights-based approach in the SDGs, with its greater emphasis on quality outcomes and distributional issues, is likely to add to these challenges.

In recent years, there has been considerable progress to ensure the legal enforceability of rights. Binding international economic and social rights are increasingly enforced through national courts. A new protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has created a new institutional path for citizens to directly submit complaints to an international monitoring body. These and other innovative approaches may help strengthen accountability for the SDGs and, with that, the political will for their implementation.

Leading questions

How can all people be more directly involved in monitoring policy results and providing feedback?

What participatory models stand out as most effective?

How can progress on the SDGs be measured from a rights-based perspective?

How synergies can be built between national and international accountability mechanisms?

Interviewees

Hon. Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Member of Parliament, Greece, and Chair, IPU Standing Committee on UN Affairs

H.E. Ms. Elizabeth Cousens, United States Representative on ECOSOC [tbc]

Ms. Corinne Woods, Director, UN Millennium Campaign

Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International

Ms. Claire Melamed, Head of Secretariat, Secretary-General's Independent Expert Group on the "Data Revolution for Sustainable Development" [tbc]

Moderator

Ms. Nermeen Shaikh, broadcast journalist, Democracy Now!

Closing session: the way forward

5:00-5:45

An evaluation form will be distributed during this session. Participants will be invited to fill out the form and leave it on their desk for IPU staff to collect.

This closing segment will focus on the process leading up to the adoption of the SDGs in September 2015. It will suggest ways for parliamentarians to be further engaged as well as highlight some of the issues that will need to be ironed out at upcoming political negotiations. Special attention to be devoted to an update on the IPU campaign in support of a governance goal.

The discussion will be introduced by the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong.

Presenters

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, DESA

Hon. Saber Chowdhury, President, Inter-Parliamentary Union