



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Statement

Hon. Ms. Paddy Torsney
Permanent Observer of the
IPU to the United Nations

United Nations Ocean Conference
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Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

This is the last day of an impressive week-long ocean conference. Many interventions recounted the problem before us, so I will focus on the way forward and the actions that national parliaments, alone and through the IPU, have pledged to support the implementation of SDG 14 and all related commitments.

For too many people, the ocean is remote, seemingly impervious to human interference, and limitless. But in fact nothing could be farther from the truth. The ocean is the largest ecosystem and in many ways the most important one. It is a source of livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people, through fishing, shipping, mining and tourism, and it provides a huge service to our planet and to people by absorbing nearly a third of carbon emissions and by contributing hugely to the food chain and to biodiversity.

And yet, everywhere we look, the ocean is at risk, if not dying. Why? Well, it comes down to a combination of economic necessity, greed, and a cavalier attitude toward the environment in general.

This conference has helped raise awareness of the ocean, and the need to act as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, it has brought the issue closer to the hearts and minds of parliamentarians all over the world. At the end of the day, parliamentarians are first in line to adopt the laws, approve regulatory changes, and make budgetary allocations that are required to advance SDG 14 and now the *Call for Action*, the main outcome of this conference.

Together with the President of the General Assembly, last February IPU organized a major parliamentary hearing here at the UN which was attended by nearly 200 members of parliament. Entitled *A world of Blue, preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet and ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda*, the hearing concluded with a set of recommendations addressed to governments, parliaments and other stakeholders, many of which, I am glad to say, are reflected in the *Call for Action*.

A number of recommendations are very specific, suggesting that parliamentarians appreciate the scale and urgency of the problem and not settle on half measures. So let me give you some highlights from the long list of actions recommended in the hearing report, which was circulated last week as document A/71/898:

- Ban single use plastic bags and polyethylene foam ;
- Make large polluters pay for damage they cause and invest the revenue in ocean remediation;
- Factor the environmental cost of shipping into future trade negotiations;

- Impose fishing moratoria and quotas to help regenerate dwindling fish stocks;
- Assess more carefully the environmental and economic risks of aquaculture and industrial fishing vs. the benefits of small scale, artisanal fishing;
- Make better use of traditional knowledge, and don't simply rely on high tech, costly solutions.

Perhaps the most important underlying message of our parliamentary hearing is that making consumption and production patterns more sustainable will not suffice in the face of a growing global population and a finite ocean environment.

As the conclusion of the report noted, reversing the decline of the ocean “*will require a more critical perspective on a way of life, particularly in developed countries, that has created unsustainable rates of consumption and pollution. The crisis of the ocean’s health represents an opportunity for a shift in value systems and behavior that is more aligned with sustainability and consideration for others, beginning with the most vulnerable.*”

Another message from the hearing had to do with the *blue economy* – a common expression which we would have loved to see in the *Call for Action*. There is no question that this economy has its rightful place next to the so-called *green economy*: they are two sides of the same coin. If we subsume the blue economy under the green economy we will not do justice to the many specific issues that affect the ocean and all of the people who depend on it.

As the *Call for Action* rightly points out, national *ownership* grounded in national development plans and strategies, will be key to implementing of the SDGs, including of course Goal 14. Having placed the SDGs at the center of its operational strategy for years to come, IPU is investing considerable resources to help parliaments and parliamentarians mainstream the SDGs, contribute to their national plans, and ensure accountability for results.

We are very pleased therefore that members of parliament have been identified in the *Call for Action* as a key constituency in this whole enterprise. Let us seize the momentum of this conference to begin to reverse the tide and return the ocean its natural state.

Thank you.