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**INTER PARES** | Parliaments in Partnership  
*EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments*



Implemented by  
International IDEA

# The Global Virtual Conference 'Catalysing Parliamentary Action to Fight Climate Change'

## HIGHLIGHTS



### Introduction

The Global Virtual Conference 'Catalysing Parliamentary Action to Fight Climate Change', held online on May 11–12, 2021, was organized by INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership *EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments* to collect and share effective, innovative and inspiring practices to empower parliaments in tackling the climate crisis. The Conference **engaged almost 1000 participants: 343 participants from 62 countries** around the world in the Zoom conferencing environment, and around **600 viewers** of the Conference YouTube stream.

The first day of the conference explored climate action from the perspective of different parliamentary functions, including legislation, oversight and budgeting. The second day delved into cross-cutting topics: regional and global co-operation, citizen engagement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The rich knowledge shared through the presentations and dialogue at the Conference will contribute to a toolkit for parliamentary climate action being produced by INTER PARES; the toolkit will also incorporate parliamentary action and commitments coming from the CoP26 meeting on Climate Change action in Glasgow, Scotland in October and November 2021.

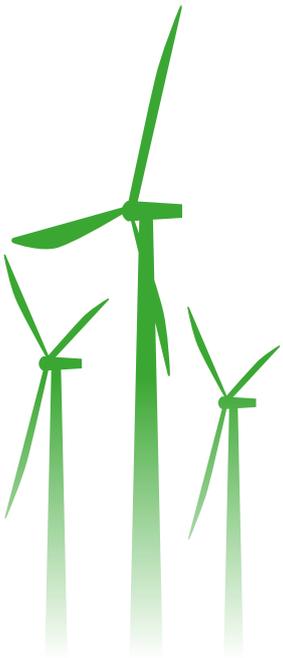
The agenda with topics and speakers can be viewed [here](#). Recordings of the conference are available on YouTube: [Day 1](#) and [Day 2](#).

**INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership – EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments** is the first global parliamentary project of its kind. Funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by International IDEA, its purpose is to strengthen the capacity of parliaments in partner countries, by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions. It focuses both on elected Members of Parliament (MPs), particularly in their capacity as members of parliamentary committees and on the staff of parliaments' secretariats.

# 10 key takeaways from the conference

**1** **We are facing a climate emergency.** Climate disruption is an urgent and existential threat to humanity. Recognising this, many parliaments around the world, including in **Bangladesh** and the **EU**, have issued declarations of climate emergency.

Climate action cannot be just the icing on the cake, it has to be baked into everything. The climate crisis is an issue of overriding concern. The stakes are really high and young people are understandably fearful for their future.



**Martin Chungong,**  
Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union

*“Climate change is critical for the future and we must ensure action today. Evidenced by Covid-19 our societies are fragile and our planet’s resources are limited. Many hit by Covid-19 have to deal with climate issues. Countries have to relocate resources to cope with the pandemic. There’s an urgent need for recovering strategies aligned with climate change and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”*



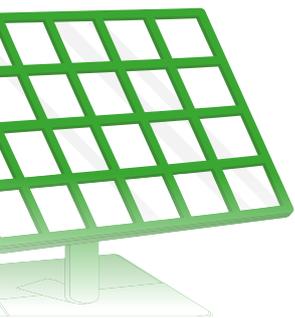
**Miguel Costa Matos,**  
Member of the Committee on the Environment, Energy and  
Territorial Planning, Portuguese Assembleia da República

*“With stronger climate legislation we must do everything possible to stop this climate emergency before it makes life impossible”*

**2** **We do not have the luxury of addressing one crisis at a time.** Humanity is facing multiple compounding crises. The climate crisis, a global pandemic and existing social injustices intersect and amplify each other.

While no one can elude the crises, we do not all suffer equally. Usually, those who are already vulnerable pay the highest price.

We need to address multiple crises at once. We need to build back better and more sustainably after the pandemic. The net-zero transition has to be as fair as it has to be quick.



**Baroness Hayman,**  
former Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, Co-Chair of Peers for the Planet

*"What we've done within 'Peers for the Planet', is create collaborative cross-party working by setting very high-level aspirations for the group. You don't have to say you're committed to carbon capture and storage or you're opposed to nuclear or you have any specific solution to some of these problems. What you have to say is that you're committed to doing something about the crisis that faces us."*

**3** **Action really cannot wait.** There is a huge gap between current policies and emission pathways compatible with the Paris Agreement targets. To limit global heating to 1.5°C, world's emissions have to fall every year by as much as they did in 2020 due to pandemic lockdowns.

Success cannot be measured just by doing slightly better than before; it needs to be measured by managing to stay within the vital planetary boundaries. Politicians are used to compromises, but one cannot compromise with the atmosphere. In the words of German sociologist Max Weber: "Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible".

2021 is a year of major decisions. Both climate and biodiversity treaties hold decisive summits. Ambition has to be scaled up as fast as possible. There is no time for mess-ups. The time for action is now.



**Paola Vega,**  
Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica,  
Vice-President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change

*"With the pandemic we are experiencing more difficulties, but we cannot generate post pandemic measures if we do not focus on climate as well. An economic recovery must be climatically sustainable. We must adjust to new challenges and this is the work we've been focusing on in the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change."*

**4** **Climate is a democracy issue and democracy is a climate issue.** Climate and democracy intersect in multiple and often forgotten ways. Left unmanaged, climate damage will challenge the functioning of democracies, especially in climate vulnerable countries and fragile states.

Democracies have a crucial role to play. On the one hand, democratic countries cause half of global emissions, with 15 democracies among the top 20 emitters. On the other hand, nine democracies make it into the top ten in an international ranking on climate performance.

Democracies also have some of the best tools to take climate action. These include climate laws strengthened by parliamentarians; ambitious emission targets required by independent courts; and the civic movements and organisations courageously led by the youth – all enabled by the free flow of information and freedom of expression. Looking at it this way, democracy itself can be one of the best antidotes against the climate crisis.

However, the assets within democracies are undermined by weaknesses. These include the short-term bias that often afflicts democratic decision-making, the danger of policy inconsistency, and the outsized role of money in politics.

Autocratic countries sometimes use climate to speak for the virtues of centralised systems in a global battle of narratives, but their record is patchy at best. Authoritarian regimes tend to hide failings, and they lack the feedback loops of open citizen input that is needed to adjust and improve policy.

When democratic institutions are not functional, we must change them. A political system needs to protect the survival of human beings. Democracy works when democracy delivers – also on climate action.



**Kevin Casas-Zamora,**  
Secretary-General, International IDEA

*“One could say that the climate crisis is both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity that democracy has ever faced. If we fail to stop climate disruption, democracies will struggle. But if we harness the power of democracy, we can take the transformative leap required to transition to a sustainable and just world while also renewing and revitalizing democracy.”*



**Lisa Badum,**  
Member of the Committee on Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Speaker for Climate Politics of the Greens, German Bundestag

*“The Federal Constitutional Court ruled that our constitution contains the right for climate protection and we are not allowed to put the future of the young generation at risk ... For three years there has been only very little movement for climate protection, but now things have accelerated and currently we are talking about strengthening and increasing the climate goals.”*

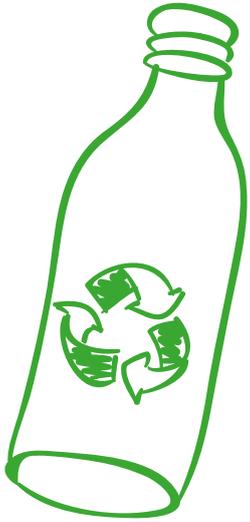
## 5

Parliaments play an indispensable role. The fact that young climate activists march to parliaments to demand action is a testament to the trust in democratic institutions. Parliamentarians must respond by rallying around strong action now.

Parliaments have key tools at their disposal, including legislation, government oversight and budgeting. They have both moral and constitutional authority, both formal and informal political influence. And many parliaments have already shown that they can deliver.

But parliamentarians need to take a leadership role. They have to challenge the status quo and push the boundaries of what is considered politically possible. Parliamentarians must have independence of thought and not serve as mouthpieces for governments. They need to be long-sighted and invest in measures that may not pay off until several election cycles later.





**Satu Hassi,**  
Chair of the Grand Committee, Finnish Parliament

*“It’s very important for all parliamentarians to be aware that it’s meaningful to take action on the national level to make stronger national legislation but it matters also for the international level. Because all positive changes on national policy have an influence also on the international level.”*



**Saber Chowdhury,**  
Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh Parliament, former President of Inter-Parliamentary Union

*“I refer to the three ‘P’s that we as parliamentarians have: The power of the **purse**: we allocate the resources so let us not underestimate that power that we have. The power of **policy**: we can shape policy; when we talk about legislation that has to be in context of policies. Legislation then is giving expression to that policy. The power of **pronouncements**, what we say in the public domain, how we engage with our constituents, motivate them, how we enlighten them, increase their awareness, not just in terms of holding governments to account, but also to see what they can do in terms of fighting climate change.”*

## 6

**Parliamentarians can act through the many tools available to them.** The speakers highlighted various concrete tools that parliaments have deployed successfully to promote climate action around the world. These include:

- Networks of parliamentarians in Latin America, the Mediterranean and globally.
- A dedicated parliamentary climate committee in Kenya and a cross-party working group in the United Kingdom.
- The inclusion of parliamentarians in the European Union delegations to

international climate negotiations.

- Guidebooks for parliamentarians in South Asian countries.
- Monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the parliaments in Denmark and Austria.

The conference explored some particularly promising tools in more detail. These included framework laws, budgeting and citizens’ assemblies.



**Kirsten Brosbøl,**  
Founder of Parliamentarians for the Global Goals, former Member of Parliament, former Minister for the Environment, Denmark

*“Parliamentarians for the Global Goals’ is an initiative launched last year to support parliamentarians all over the world, share best practices and experiences about how legislators can work with implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Since then, we have mobilized 100 parliamentarians from 47 different countries in this network.”*

**7** **Climate laws provide the foundation for change.** The number of climate-related laws and policies worldwide has grown from around 70 in 1997 to more than 2,000. An interesting subset are framework climate laws that set up strategic directions for the whole economy and create institutional infrastructure to reach emission targets.

**The United Kingdom** adopted a groundbreaking climate change act in 2008. Since then, it has been frequently used as a model, and now there are around 35 framework climate laws around the world. Key elements of the act include a long-term net zero target, regularly updated mid-term emission targets, and an independent scientific advisory body.

The act has been credited with securing and strengthening climate action in the UK. Since 2008, the country has had five changes of governments, four general elections and three political crises, but despite this political instability, emission reductions have actually accelerated. The act has contributed to improving the political debate and protecting against backsliding.

**Denmark** adopted the first climate act in 2013 and strengthened it in 2020. The updated law includes legally binding emission targets of 70% reduction by 2030 and net-zero by 2050. An independent advisory council reviews government policies and recommends measures.

The government is required to present annually to the parliament a status update on implementation. The report separately covers international emissions, including shipping and aviation. If the government is not likely to meet the emission targets, it is required to introduce corrective measures. The parliament scrutinises government plans with a link to the annual budget.

Many other jurisdictions are working on climate laws. **Portugal** is introducing a law with an independent scientific committee, parliamentary scrutiny, local planning requirements and public participation. **Finland** is updating its 2015 law, including a target to achieve net negative emissions and a separate climate council for the indigenous Sami people. The **French** climate law is exceptional in the sense that it builds heavily on the work of the citizens’ assembly (see below). The recently adopted European Climate Law covers climate action at the **EU** level, including a legally binding commitment for climate neutrality by 2050.

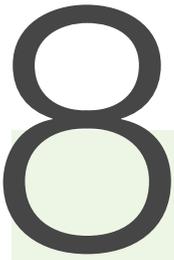


**Jean-René Cazeneuve,**  
Member of the Finance Committee, General Rapporteur  
of the Climate & Resilience Law, French National Assembly

*“I don’t think we can create one and only law that can work for 20 years, it’s impossible... It’s important to be quick, but to work step by step at the same time.”*

**Rasmus Helveg Petersen,**  
The Chair of The Climate, Energy and Utilities Committee,  
Danish Parliament

*“What we have with our Danish Climate Act is a broad political agreement that lies behind us. That makes me confident that the parliamentary mechanisms established within this current climate act will ensure scrutiny and oversight and the necessary progress towards the objectives of the Climate Act. These will be tools that this Parliament will use many years ahead.”*



**Budgeting can power climate action.** Budgets can either accelerate or slow down climate efforts. That is why many countries are turning their attention to aligning budgets with climate commitments.

A green budget was adopted in **France** to increase transparency on how tax revenue is used. Spending is screened from six perspectives, including reducing emissions and adapting to climate impacts. Each expenditure is categorised either green (favourable), brown (unfavourable), mixed (favourable from one perspective, but unfavourable from another) or neutral. Out of the total €574 billion in the 2021 budget, €53 billion in expenditure were considered to have an environmental impact, of which 72% were favourable, 9% were neutral and 19% were unfavourable.

This dashboard gives parliamentarians an overview of the impacts of government spending, allowing them to take this information into account when debating and adopting the budget. The indicators help in identifying both synergies and trade-offs, such as biofuels reducing emissions but harming biodiversity.

In **Austria**, the government reports to the parliament on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report is reviewed in different parliamentary committees. Indicators and benchmarks with EU averages help in monitoring progress.

The oversight is integrated into the budget process. Each outcome objective in the performance budgeting system should be linked to a corresponding SDG. An independent budget office supports the budget committee in scrutinising the proposal.

UNDP has been working with several Asian countries to integrate climate considerations into budgets. For instance, **Nepal** developed a guidebook for parliamentarians with background information and tools for budget scrutiny.



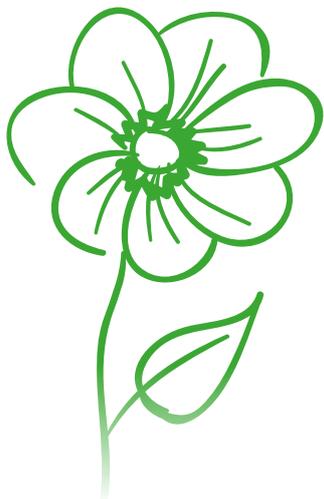
**Bénédicte Peyrol,**  
Member of the Committee of Finances, French National Assembly

*“The green budget can be a very powerful tool and promising for the future: it brings more transparency, it’s useful for parliamentarians. It will help us tackle environmental issues through a budgetary approach.”*



**Helmut Berger,**  
Head of the Budget Office, Parliamentary Directorate, Austrian Parliament

*“The Austrian Parliament deals with the SDGs on several levels and committees. Austrian Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) took up the SDGs at a very early stage in context with the new Austrian organic budget law, which provides performance budgeting. As a part of the budget analysis 2021, the PBO analysed the SDGs and compared the individual indicators with the values of the EU indicators.”*



# 9

**Citizens’ assemblies build legitimacy for climate action.** Citizens’ assemblies are representative bodies of citizens established for policy deliberation. They have been used in a wide range of legislatures, including **Scotland, Denmark** and the **Washington state**, on key policy issues, including climate action.

The most prominent example is the **French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat**, established as a reaction to protests both for (youth climate activists) and against (yellow vests) climate action. The assembly consisted of a sample of 150 citizens representing the diversity of the French population. The assembly heard experts and deliberated for nine months, in the end coming up with 149 proposals.

The proposals were submitted to the parliament which debated them for 21 days over seven sessions and adopted 1,000 amendments. Two of the proposals were delegated to a referendum. According to polling, 7 in 10 French people had heard about the assembly and 6 in 10 considered it legitimate to make recommendations on behalf of the French people. A majority also supported the proposals with one exception (limiting driving speeds on highways).

Another citizens’ climate assembly was established by the parliament in **Ireland**. The assembly included 100 people and met over two weekends. The assembly came up with 13 recommendations, all supported by more than 80% of the members. Proposals included measures that are not usually considered particularly popular, such as higher taxes.

The parliament established a special committee to review the proposals and published a report. The committee largely supported the proposals, with the exception of taxing emissions from agriculture.



**Lise Deshautel,**  
Advisor to the French Citizens’ Assembly on Climate

*“Climate assemblies can be a useful policy-making tool – under some conditions - to channel passion, include diverse voices, and overcome political deadlocks. But they are not a “one-size-fits-all” solution as they are part of a broader toolbox of deliberative instruments to be explored. Political and moral commitment in organising citizens’ assemblies is important.”*

# 10

**Climate action needs to involve everyone.** The climate crisis impacts everyone, both current and future generations. It is too serious to be left to politicians, citizens, businesspeople, scientists or any other group of people alone. Solving the challenge requires involving everyone. In parliaments this means all committees and parliamentarians both in government and opposition. Decisions need to also be informed by independent advisors and experts.

In democracies nothing is possible without the citizens, but nothing is sustainable without institutions. When deciding on climate action, politicians need to take citizens on board – including the ones who are struggling.

To involve everyone requires also revisiting the narrative and language used. Climate action has to be connected with people’s daily needs, including jobs and the economy. Solving the greatest challenge of our times need not be a sacrifice as there is so much to gain from taking action.



**Jonathan Murphy,**  
Head of Programme, INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership

*“Effective democratic parliaments are at the core of successful action to stop climate change. Climate change affects everyone and can only be addressed by common action across social and political divides. Parliaments bring together society’s elected representatives in all their political, geographic, socio-economic and cultural diversity. Parliaments must be empowered to enhance their capacities to develop and strengthen climate change legislation, to vigorously oversee government climate change action, to vote the budgets needed for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and always, to ensure that burdens and the benefits of climate policies are shared equitably across the population and around the world”.*

## Dedication

This conference report is dedicated to H.E. Mohamed Nasheed, the Speaker of the People's Majlis, the Republic of the Maldives. He was scheduled to deliver a keynote speech, but was critically injured in a terrorist attack a few days before the conference.

Speaker Nasheed is known for his leadership in fighting for democracy and human rights as well as against the climate crisis. The conference organisers are grateful for his speedy recovery after the despicable attack and wish him success in his important work.



“ We are not prepared to die.  
And the Maldives has no intention of dying.  
We are not going to become the first victims of the climate crisis.  
Instead, we are going to do everything in our power to keep our heads above water.  
We harbour no illusions about the dangers.  
And we are acutely aware of our own vulnerability.  
Climate change is a national security issue for us. It is an existential threat. ”

H.E. Mohamed Nasheed at COP24 (the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in 2018)

## Thank you

On behalf of the Organising Committee of the Global Virtual Conference ‘Catalysing Parliamentary Action to Fight Climate Change’ INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership expresses its deepest appreciation to:

- 🌱 The Climate Change Reference Group that includes Julie Agersnap from the Danish Parliament, Leyla Arslan from the French Assambly, Aleksandra Blagojevic from the IPU, Tomas Brandejsky from the Czech Chamber of Deputies, Marja Ekroos from the Finnish Parliament, Rita Ferreira from the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic, Karlee Johnson from the IPU, Dalila Maulide from the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic, Claudia Rathjen from German Bundestag.
- 🌱 European Union which provides all of the funding for INTER PARES.
- 🌱 International IDEA which hosts and delivers the INTER PARES project.
- 🌱 The distinguished Speakers to the Conference:
  - Georgios Amanatidis**, Parliamentary Research Administrator, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament; **Alina Averchenkova**, Distinguished Policy Fellow, Grantham Research Institute; **Lisa Badum**, Member of the Committee on Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Speaker for Climate Politics of the Greens, German Bundestag; **Helmut Berger**, Head of the Budget Office, Parliamentary Directorate, Austrian Parliament; **Katja Biedenkopf**, Associate Professor, Sustainable Futures research group, KU Leuven, Belgium; **Kirsten Brosbøl**, Founder of Parliamentarians for the Global Goals, former Minister for the Environment, former Member of Parliament, Denmark; **Kevin Casas-Zamora**, Secretary-General, International IDEA; **Jean-René Cazeneuve**, Member of the Finance Committee, General Rapporteur of the Climate & Resilience Law, French National Assembly; **Saber Chowdhury**, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh Parliament, former President of Inter-Parliamentary Union; **Martin Chungong**, Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union; **Miguel Costa Matos**, Member of the Committee on the Environment, Energy and Territorial Planning, Portuguese Assembleia da República; **Lise Deshautel**, Advisor to the French Citizens’ Assembly on Climate; **Maria Gabriela Graell**, Director of International Relations, Head of the Office for SDGs, the National Assembly of Panama; **Satu Hassi**, Chair of the Grand Committee, Finnish Parliament; **Baroness Hayman**, former Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, Co-Chair of Peers for the Planet; **Rafael Jimenez Aybar**, Environmental Democracy Adviser, Westminster Foundation for Democracy; **Gonzalo Jorro-Martinez**, Policy Officer – Democracy – Parliaments and Political Parties, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission; **Emilie Lemieux**, Deputy Director, Open Parliament and Sustainable Development, ParlAmericas; **Asad Maken**, Public Finance and Governance Specialist, UNDP; **Helena Marschall**, Climate Activist, Fridays for Future, global climate strike movement; **Delaine McCullough**, Head of Climate Finance Accountability, International Budget Partnership; **Malini Mehra**, CEO, Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment; **Jonathan Murphy**, Head of Programme, INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership, International IDEA; **Javier Perez**, Director of Political Watch, CEO of Parlamento 2030 (PMO); **Rasmus Helveg Petersen**, The Chair of The Climate, Energy and Utilities Committee, Danish Parliament; **Bénédicte Peyrol**, Member of the Committee of Finances, French National Assembly; **Michael Scoullios**, Secretary-General, Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development; **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries; **Diarmuid Torney**, Expert Advisory Group member, Irish Citizens’ Assembly 2016-18, Associate Professor, Dublin City University; **Oras Tynkkynen**, former Member of the Finnish Parliament, INTER PARES Climate Consultant; **Paola Vega**, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, Vice-President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change.
- 🌱 The participants of the Conference.

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