



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

17 January 2017

Excellency,

As you know, the General Assembly has welcomed the annual Parliamentary Hearings at the United Nations organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (resolution 68/272) and has decided to pursue a more systematic engagement with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in organizing and integrating a parliamentary component of and contribution to major United Nations deliberative processes and the review of international commitments (resolutions 65/123 and 66/261).

I wish to inform you that the 2017 IPU Parliamentary Hearing at United Nations Headquarters will take place on 13 and 14 February 2017. It will be entitled "A World of Blue: Preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet, ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda".

As indicated in the attached letter and programme, the Parliamentary Hearing is devoted to oceans, seas and marine resources and its conservation and sustainable use, as well as the vast ramifications for economic, social and environmental policies both nationally and globally.

To confirm the participation of your delegation and for more information, kindly contact the Office of the Permanent Observer of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union at ny-office@mail.ipu.org.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Thomson".

Peter Thomson

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



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

A World of Blue: Preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet, ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda



Annual Parliamentary Hearing
United Nations Headquarters
Trusteeship Council Chamber, Secretariat Building
13-14 February 2017

Draft Programme

Session I	Feb 13	9.30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Official opening		9.30 – 10 a.m.
<i>Welcome remarks from the leadership: UN and IPU</i>	<p>H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly</p> <p>Hon. Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union</p> <p>H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General</p>	
The state of the oceans: challenges and opportunities		10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
<p>Background:</p> <p><i>First World Ocean Assessment, United Nations</i> http://www.worldoceanassessment.org/</p> <p><i>Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development -</i> https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld</p>	<p>The First World Ocean Assessment prepared under the auspices of the United Nations shows oceans at risk: resource overexploitation, marine life deterioration, and biodiversity loss, linked to human activity, are undermining the sustainability of the world's largest ecosystem. For too long oceans have been treated as a dumping ground, as a readily available source of food or minerals, or as an infinite recreation or commercial arena, without much care for the long-term impacts of these activities.</p> <p>Over the last few decades, the international community has developed a legal framework to prompt governments, and through them other stakeholders such as businesses, into action including remedial action. Led by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, this framework defines the rights and responsibilities of States with respect to their use of the world's oceans, including the protection and preservation of the marine environment and the management of marine natural resources.</p> <p>Last year's groundbreaking Sustainable Development Goals include Goal 14 calling on all countries to "conserve and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources." Goal 14 includes a number of time-bound targets on key issues.</p> <p>Implementing Goal 14 and related targets throughout the SDGs framework will be critical to restoring the sustainability of the oceans for planetary and human well-being, including support for livelihoods and for generations to come.</p>	
	Video presentation	
	Leading questions	
	What are the key commitments of Goal 14 and how can Goal 14 be integrated into national SDGs and related development plans?	
	What assistance exists and what additional assistance should the UN, including its specialized agencies and funds, provide to help countries implement Goal 14?	
	How can parliamentarians help raise awareness of the challenges as well as the opportunities of ocean preservation at the policy level and with the public at large?	
Lunch break		1 - 2.45 p.m.

Session II		Feb 13	3 p.m. – 5.30 p.m.	
The economic benefit of oceans: balancing exploitation with environmental preservation				
<p>Background:</p> <p><i>Sustainable Consumption and Production - United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – http://www.unep.org/10yfp/About/WhatisSCP/tabid/106246/Default.aspx</i></p> <p><i>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - http://www.fao.org/fisheries/en/</i></p> <p><i>Fact sheet on Tourism and Biodiversity, World Tourism Organization – http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/biodiversity.pdf</i></p>	<p>As an economic and ecosystem resource, oceans and seas provide food, jobs, and livelihoods to hundreds of millions of people around the world. The market value of marine and coastal resources and industries is estimated at \$3 trillion annually, or about 5 percent of global GDP.</p> <p>An entire fishing industry and related retail apparatus to bring sea food to markets depends on the availability of caught fish as well as, increasingly, on capital intensive aquaculture (fish farms). Oceans and coastal areas provide the setting for a growing tourism industry in terms of traffic, resorts construction, retail services, and related infrastructure. Some ninety percent of the world’s international internet connectivity, with all of its economic spin offs, depends on submarine cables that need to be preserved within the changing ecosystem, requiring an enormous financial investment. Many national economies and entire communities continue to depend on offshore drilling for oil, gas and minerals.</p> <p>In a world in which job creation is vital to economic, social and political stability, it is important that these and many other industries be supported or reconfigured to lessen their impact on the ocean environment and ensure long-term economic viability for their respective industry as well as the community in which they thrive.</p> <p>Careful management will be required, for example, to replenish and maintain fish stocks, to protect coastal and marine habitats from further exploitation or to assist with the transition from oil and gas to renewable energy sources like wind or underwater energy turbines. A large scale mobilization of public and private investments within a strong legislative and regulatory framework, in accordance with international law will need to underpin these efforts.</p>			
	Leading questions			
	How can consumption and production patterns be reformed to decouple the economic benefits of ocean-related products and services from environmental degradation?			
	In addition to international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, what regulatory framework is needed to sustainably manage aquaculture?			
	How can the regulatory framework for various industries – the tourism industry, fishing, and extractive industries – be strengthened to limit its impact on the ocean and coastal environment and support communities dependent on the health of the oceans?			
Reception for MPs and Ambassadors			5.45 – 7.30 p.m.	
IPU Office, Uganda House, 336 East 45 th Street (10 th floor)				
Session III		Feb 14	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	
Protecting and preserving marine life: the disruptive effects of pollution, marine debris and other waste & opportunities for change			10 – 11:30 a.m.	
<p>Background:</p> <p><i>Oceans and the law of the sea – Report of the UN Secretary- General (A/71/74) – https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/081/27/PDF/N1608127.pdf?OpenElement</i></p>	<p>Pollution, marine debris and other waste resulting from land-based activities far from the ocean as well as discharged from shipping and other maritime activities are a major contributor to the deteriorating ocean environment.</p> <p>Fertilizers and pesticides used in agriculture, sewage, and industrial chemicals flow into rivers with little or no regulation ending up into oceans and contaminating sea life. Plastics and micro-plastics whose chemical components never breakdown disrupt the food chain, potentially disrupting the lives and contributing to disease in marine life, fish stocks as well as humans. Debris of all sort, from construction materials to consumer items (cans, water bottles, etc.) and abandoned fishing gear pose a threat to shipping traffic and deface the coastal environment when they land ashore.</p>			

<p>“Sources, fate and effects of microplastics in the marine environment – a global assessment” GESAMP report</p> <p>“UNEP (2016): <i>Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics: Global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change</i>’</p> <p>Chapter 25 on Marine debris – Integrated Global Marine Assessment - http://www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/WOA_Reg_Process.htm</p>	<p>Most often, the costs associated with pollution and waste released into the ocean is transferred to local communities or onto industries more closely dependent on the marine environment, rather than being accounted for into the production or consumption processed upstream.</p> <p>Leading questions</p> <p>What are the most important provisions in the international legal framework to address these problems and how can such provisions be translated into effective action at the national level?</p> <p>What are the best legislative and regulatory practices to limit pollution and waste at the source, before they end up in the water? Could the “polluter pays principle” be more effectively applied to address this challenge?</p> <p>What infrastructure and institutional capacities are needed to help countries address this problem and create opportunity in this field?</p>
<p>The climate change connection: rising sea levels, acidification and other ecosystem changes 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.</p>	
<p>Background:</p> <p><i>Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;</i> http://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/</p> <p><i>The Paris Agreement on climate change -</i> http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php</p> <p>“In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants” Report of the Secretary-General, document A/70/59</p>	<p>Climate change represents a new and overarching challenge to the health of the oceans. By increasing surface temperatures, excess carbon emissions released into the air are changing the very “chemistry” of the oceans through acidification, increased salinity, and stratification. Damage to coastal wetlands, a powerful carbon sink, further contributes to global warming.</p> <p>The combination of melting ice sheets and expansion of warming water is causing sea levels to rise. Climate change is increasingly disrupting marine life, including fish stocks, as well as causing near irreversible ecosystem loss, as in the case of coral reefs.</p> <p>Hundreds of millions of people living in low-lying coastal areas and urban centers are at risk. Extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tsunamis are more common, and the food chain that is required to support healthy fish stocks and other marine life is further undermined.</p> <p>Leading questions</p> <p>How can countries respond effectively to climate change and its specific threat to the world’s oceans, through mitigation and adaptation efforts?</p> <p>What risk reduction measures need to be put in place to protect coastal areas?</p> <p>How can parliaments engage with citizens, civil society and the private sector to help build political will in support of climate change legislation and regulation?</p>

Session IV	Feb 14	2.45 p.m. – 5.45 p.m.
Ocean governance: strengthening of peace, maritime security, cooperation and friendly relations among all nations		2.45 – 5.30 p.m.
<p>Background:</p> <p><i>United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea</i> http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/text/unclos/unclos_e.pdf</p> <p><i>The International Seabed Authority: Structure and Functions –</i> https://www.isa.org.im/sites/default/files/files/documents/isastructfunct.pdf</p>	<p>The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the “constitution” that governs the world’s oceans and seas and within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. Its importance and consequence in terms of international law can only be compared to the Charter of the United Nations. Among other things, the Convention provides for the freedom of the high seas and has established the International Seabed Authority to govern the Area, i.e., the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, which was declared by the United Nations as the “common heritage of mankind”. To date, there are 168 parties to the Convention, including the European Union. Many UNCLOS provisions also reflect customary international law, as recognized by most non-parties to it.</p> <p>While the Convention remains as relevant today as when it came into force in 1994, it is not entirely immune to challenges and questions of interpretation in light of changing realities.</p> <p>New technologies developed over the last three decades have led to new discoveries with an economic potential, and made it possible to exploit living marine resources, oil and minerals in areas beyond national jurisdiction. This requires enhanced international cooperation with a view to preventing disputes and avoiding further harm to the ocean ecosystem. The effects of climate change on oceans need to be better understood in the terms of opportunities, negative impact and the need for mitigation and adaptation. International cooperation to manage depleting shared fish stocks and in the exploitation of the seabed has grown more important. The creation of marine sanctuaries or marine protected areas in areas beyond national jurisdiction to protect the marine environment is under discussion by the international community.</p> <p>Concerns in respect to maritime security, mixed migration by sea, piracy and armed robbery at sea, as well as in respect to certain military activities may require enhanced international cooperation.</p> <p>Leading questions</p> <p>How can international cooperation around issues of common concern be improved?</p> <p>How can parliaments facilitate dispute resolution concerning fish stocks and the preservation of marine life in international waters?</p> <p>Are additional international agreements needed to address new issues in ocean governance? What role can parliaments play?</p>	
Closing session: the way forward		5.30 – 5.45 p.m.
<p>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.</p>	<p>This session will present some of the preliminary conclusions of the meeting which will be further elaborated in its final report.</p> <p>Speakers</p> <p>Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General</p> <p>H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly (or other UN representative)</p>	