

## **IPU Events at United Nations High Level Political Forum July 2019**

Report from Rt Hon Lord Jack McConnell  
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On behalf of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I attended several events in New York in July 2019 as part of the annual United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The main business of the HLPF is to hear presentations from around 40 member states outlining their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) on progress towards the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Alongside the Ministerial Forum, the UN also convenes discussions on development and this year the HLPF was preceded by the Senior-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, at which the IPU was officially represented.

I attended the two days of the GPECD; the IPU Parliamentary Forum that preceded the HLPF itself; several side events; and the HLPF, at which the UK was presenting its first Voluntary National Review since the Global Goals were agreed in 2015.

It was important for representatives of national parliaments to be in attendance as parliaments have a key role in agreeing and implementing development strategies, holding governments to account and agreeing budgets and other provisions for the implementation of the Global Goals. Over the weekend of the conference, there were several positive references to the important role of parliaments and the need for governments to engage properly with Members of Parliament. There were, however, very few examples of that happening in practice, and in the main the conference seemed to be repeating the same messages as delivered in previous years without taking the debate further forward through practical examples or practical proposals. I did manage to make an intervention, specifically about the importance of Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, but even in this area there seemed to be few examples that could then be used by participants to take forward the debate afterwards.

The conference also made regular references to the importance of gender equality and the participation of women at all levels, although this message was negated by the final session where three years of Co-Chairs speaking together on a six person all male panel.

Having attended previous development cooperation conferences, I was disappointed. While it is essential that the discussions on effective development cooperation continue, and no doubt there has been progress, I did feel that the conference was repeating many previous discussions rather than taking some bold steps forward.

The IPU Summit on the SDG's was well attended although, unfortunately, the set up did not allow the full participation of all delegations due to time restrictions. Many delegations spoke of the importance of parliamentary engagement with the SDG's at all levels but many also expressed frustrations at the level of that engagement actually taking place. The Summit was a useful opportunity to take stock on this in advance of the HLPF and the United Nations SDG Summit due to take place at the end of September 2019.

One issue became the focus of attention. Unlike previous draft declarations for UN summits on Agenda 2030, it was reported that the draft declaration for the SDG Summit in September 2019 did not include a reference to parliamentarians when listing the key stakeholders. Member delegations were requested to raise this issue with their governments to highlight this serious omission in advance of the Summit.

In addition to attending a number of side events on Goal 16 and education, as well as taking the opportunity to meet with a number of diplomats and UN officials alongside other UK parliamentarians, I was also able to meet with Department of International Development Secretary of State Rt Hon Rory Stewart MP, Lords' DfID Minister Baroness Sugg, and listen to the UK presentation of our government's Voluntary National Review. The VNR presentation is a short session and involves questions from stakeholders. The questions to the UK were quite challenging and while the VNR did highlight some progress it has also highlighted the need for more progress both at home and abroad. There will be a need to follow up on this over the coming months.

Throughout the week, I was struck by two consistent observations. First, the vast majority of countries - including the UK - need to inject more urgency into their efforts to deliver on

Agenda 2030. There needs to be a decade of delivery starting next year, commitments need to be meaningful and leadership needs to be more consistent. And, second, while the UK continues to be a positive force internationally, diplomatic friends and officials in international organisations are unclear where we are going with 'Global Britain'. It is time to spell that out and demonstrate our engagement more consistently.