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17 August 2011

Dear Mr. President,

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will mark a major moment in international debates about future global action to address poverty, growing inequalities, and environmental challenges. This event - also known as Rio+20 - will take place in Rio de Janeiro next year, twenty years after the Earth Summit in 1992.

The Earth Summit was a headline international event that helped entrench the concept of sustainable development, bringing economic, social and environmental policies into a single coherent framework. Rio+20 offers an unequalled opportunity to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress and setbacks and chart the road ahead. It will focus on two main themes: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction; and the institutional strategy for sustainable development.

In 1992, the Inter-Parliamentary Union provided parliamentary input and support to the Earth Summit. It also convened a parliamentary conference to debate measures parliaments could take to implement the Summit's outcome. Ten years later, the IPU again lent parliamentary support to the 2002 follow up conference in Johannesburg. The IPU also adopted several resolutions on various aspects of sustainable development (Seoul, 1997; Marrakesh, 2002; Geneva, 2004; Nairobi, 2006; Addis Ababa, 2009; and Panama, 2010).

Today, the United Nations is again turning to the IPU for parliamentary support to Rio+20. The Secretary General of the Conference has invited us to contribute suggestions for the content and outcome of this event. Inter-governmental negotiations of the outcome document of the Conference will begin in January on the basis of inputs it has received.

Mr. Fred de Graaf
President of the Senate
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I therefore invite you to share with me the views and recommendations of your parliament. Your input will help me to prepare a brief written submission to the United Nations before the deadline of 1 November 2011.

I would be particularly interested to receive your thoughts on the objectives of the Conference and its two themes. You may wish to consider the following questions: is the green economy a useful approach to sustainable development, and what should be some of its main elements? What are the three most important reasons why policy prescriptions for sustainability remain hard to implement? How can the three prongs of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) be further integrated in the work of parliament and other national institutions? What time bound targets and objectives should reasonably be included in the new Rio agreement?

We will be briefing parliamentarians on preparations for Rio+20 during the 125th IPU Assembly in Bern in October at a panel debate on the green economy. You can find additional information on Rio+20 at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/>. For a review of the IPU resolutions on this subject I invite you to consult our web site at <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm>

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theo Ben Gurirab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Theo-Ben Gurirab