



Report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

17th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly

Virtual Sessions

November 16 and 27, 2020

Report

Delegation Members and Staff

On 16 and 27 November 2020, Mr. Marc Serré, MP, Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, and the Honourable Rosa Galvez, Senator, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section and Vice-President–North America of ParlAmericas’ Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, led a delegation to ParlAmericas’ 17th Plenary Assembly, which was focused on the topic of “Towards a Circular Economy” and was hosted virtually by the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. The other delegates were the Honourable Kim Pate, Senator, Mr. Steven Blaney, MP and Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay, MP. Delegates were accompanied by Ms. Alison Clegg and Ms. Julie Pelletier, Advisor and Association Secretary to the Canadian Section, respectively.

Working Session – November 16, 2020

Opening Remarks

In providing opening remarks, Ms. Elizabeth Cabezas, member of Ecuador’s National Assembly and outgoing President of ParlAmericas, spoke about the importance of making the COVID-19 global pandemic an opportunity for change and improvement. As well, she emphasized the potential for countries to work together to find a pathway to sustainable development and inclusion.

On behalf of the Parliament of Costa Rica, María Inés Solís, member of Costa Rica’s Legislative Assembly and member of ParlAmericas’ Board of Directors, welcomed participants and highlighted the ways in which the concept of a “circular economy” could improve competitiveness and create jobs.

Bridgid Annisette-George, Speaker of Trinidad and Tobago’s House of Representatives and member of ParlAmericas’ Board of Directors, also provided a perspective about the circular economy. She noted that, until a few generations ago, the concept of a circular economy had been unnecessary because people conserved resources out of necessity. She mentioned the lessons she had learned from her grandmother about conservation, and pointed out that a circular economy has the potential to contribute to the accomplishment of several of the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ms. Annisette-George concluded by presenting two new ParlAmericas reports: [Guide on Supporting a Post-COVID-19 Green Economic Recovery](#); and [Guide on Green Parliaments](#).

Introduction by the Moderator

Senator Galvez moderated the working session. She drew attention to the variety of participants at the session, noting the presence of legislators and legislative staff, subject-matter experts and youth leaders. Senator Galvez commented that the objective of the plenary assembly was to learn from each other about the ways in which countries can transition away from the “linear economic model” as they “build back” from the impacts of

the COVID-19 pandemic. In her view, this model is based on the concept of infinite quantities of inexpensive, widely available resources, which is inconsistent with the reality of the earth's finite resources.

Senator Galvez noted that, while the pandemic may have reduced the human “ecological footprint”, the causes of this reduction have also led to considerable inequality of various kinds. In pointing out that legislators are accountable for the success or failure of government responses to the pandemic, she added that they must take every opportunity to help build a more resilient society by promoting constructive and inclusive conversations about possible ways to “build forward” together. As well, Senator Galvez highlighted a white paper she had authored on the topic of a “clean and just recovery” from the pandemic.

Panel Discussion

The two presenters were: Mr. David Oswald, Founder and President of Design + Environment; and Ms. Virginia Rose Losada, Specialist, Sustainable Enterprise Development and Job Creation, Office for the Caribbean, International Labour Organization (ILO). Topics addressed during the session included: the concept of a circular economy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; ways to finance the transformation to a circular economic model; circular economy practices in tourism; strategies for achieving diversification and job creation consistent with a “just transition” away from fossil fuel-based economies; the integration of women and youth into strategies for a circular economy and a just transition; and legislative support for a shift to a circular economy.

Mr. Oswald pointed out that the pandemic has highlighted: profound global economic interconnectedness coincident with shared vulnerabilities; a fragile relationship between humanity and nature; and a lack of resilience in national economies. In his view, the pandemic has exposed a need for greater adaptive capacity and resilience.

In explaining that the core idea of a circular economy is to minimize the damage caused by outputs of industrial and economic activities while “converting output flows to input flows,” Mr. Oswald pointed out that this type of closed-loop thinking can be applied at the level of an organization or firm, as well as at a country level; in all cases, data collection and tracking are necessary. He mentioned some tools that governments can use to influence behaviour, such as taxes on carbon and on waste, and incentives for “sustainable behaviour.”

Concerning countries’ financing of a shift to a more circular economy, Mr. Oswald emphasized the availability of multilateral funds, including through the Global Environment Facility. He noted that multilateral development banks, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, are increasingly interested in financing efforts relating to the circular economy. According to him, some development banks are moving away from support for certain fossil fuels and instead investing in such ventures as renewable energy projects, perhaps with a reduced return on their investment. He commented that, in this context, countries must be strategic and entrepreneurial when seeking financing for environmental initiatives.

Mr. Oswald emphasized that legislators should base their policy positions related to environmental sustainability on evidence. As well, he asserted that legislators can establish high expectations concerning the ways in which multinational firms operate in their countries. He provided the example of a large apparel company that operates based on an initiative known as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, which aims “to mainstream the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services into decision-making at all levels.” In his view, with incentives and expectations about high operating standards, companies can do business in a country in a constructive, positive way.

Ms. Losada’s focus was the labour dimensions of a transition to a more “sustainable” economy. She began her presentation with by discussing the Caribbean region, where “uncontrolled” climate change and natural disasters present significant challenges for sustainable development, including as they damage infrastructure, disrupt business activity and eliminate jobs. In her view, there is a need for change not just in production, but also in consumption; the way in which societies achieve this change will cause profound adjustments in the world of work. She asserted that the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated that healthy societies and economies depend on a healthy environment.

According to Ms. Losada, the term "just transition" emerged in the United States in the 1970s as part of ensuring that coal workers were not "left behind" as coal mining declined. She noted a study showing that a transition to a "zero emission economy" in Latin America and the Caribbean would yield – on balance – 15 million new jobs by 2030, but urged legislators to consider the “quality” of those jobs. In providing the ILO's perspective that structural transformation of economies must be just and inclusive, she defined “just transition” as a shift to an economy with low or no carbon emissions that occurs in a way that secures the livelihoods of people displaced from their jobs because of the transition. Ms. Losada highlighted the ILO's guidelines concerning a just transition, characterizing them as a policy framework and a practical tool to help countries manage the transition while achieving their climate change commitments and the SDGs by 2030.

Ms. Losada underscored the ILO's approach, which places value on "social dialogue" – communication among government representatives, private-sector employers, employees and others – that helps to promote consensus-building and democratic involvement. She asserted that governments and legislators – through organizations like ParlAmericas – can play an important role in advancing such discussions.

On the topic of a circular economy in the tourism sector, Ms. Losada identified tourism as many Caribbean islands’ main economic sector, contributing almost one-third to the region's gross domestic product. She added that there is no single way to implement a circular economy; the requirements vary by context and sector, with – for example – large hotels, tour guides and cruise ships each needing to make very different changes.

Ms. Losada further explained that there is also no single way of integrating women and youth into emerging jobs or sectors, and promoting their economic opportunities, while working towards a circular economy or a just transition. In her view, including women, youth and other groups in emerging sectors will not happen by chance; instead, it must be very purposefully planned or women – for example – will remain at the lower ends of value chains, where their capacity to earn income is limited.

Finally, Ms. Losada commented that data collection and analysis are necessary for making circular economy strategies possible in each sector, and noted that the European Union uses tax incentives to promote more circular economies, although subsidies can also be effective. According to her, legislators alone are not responsible for supporting a circular economy; it is also a responsibility of the private sector, and legislators should have expectations about the ways in which firms operating in their countries are implementing circular economy principles.

In concluding the panel discussion, Senator Galvez provided Mr. Oswald and Ms. Losada with an opportunity to pose questions to the legislators. In commenting that political will is an essential ingredient for developing policies relating to sustainability, Mr. Oswald asked the legislators whether that will exists in their country, and questioned the opportunities and barriers that exist concerning the development of initiatives relating to the circular economy. Ms. Losada said that, from the perspective of an international agency of the UN, she is interested in learning about the challenges that legislators face when attempting to influence legislation and policies, and about the role that the UN and other international organizations could play in supporting such efforts.

Discussion

Following the presentations by Mr. Oswald and Ms. Losada, legislators and representatives of several youth organizations made comments and posed questions.

Jamaican Senator Sapphire Longmore focused on the challenge of balancing environmental protection with the urgent need for national income given the economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic. She commented that the political will to protect the environment can be compromised by financial needs and funding shortfalls.

In underscoring the challenges for legislators of turning political will into action, Ms. Annisette-George gave the example of Trinidad and Tobago's national environment policy, which does mention "green economy" or "circular economy." As an example of the difficulty of ensuring that "will" becomes "action," she highlighted a recent national budget that had stated that import duties and taxes would be removed from LED bulbs; however, she could not find evidence that that measure had actually been implemented. In her view, legislators should pose questions and challenge governments on their progress in implementing policies. She also mentioned that governments may need to make short-term sacrifices for long-term environmental benefits, such as through incurring an up-front cost for new technologies, and should be prepared to deal with the political impacts of such sacrifices.

Arthur Holder, who is Speaker of Barbados' House of Assembly, noted the importance of governments continuing the environmental progress of their predecessors. He also outlined some steps his government has taken to promote a circular economy, protect the terrestrial and marine environments, and work towards carbon neutrality. In his view, especially in a tourism-based economy, a linear economic model is damaging to the environment, and a circular economic model is more likely to lead to prosperity.

Mr. Serré highlighted some considerations for regions that depend heavily on national resources and mining, such as northern Ontario; these regions may also have been affected by reduced tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. He commented on the

importance of both data disaggregated by region and the involvement of local universities and other institutions in providing and sharing relevant data.

Ms. Deirdre Shurland, from the UN Environment Programme, spoke about the challenges of moving from environmental policies to strategies to practices, particularly when countries have weak bureaucracies that are resistant to change.

Ms. Alejandra Fernández, from the UN Environment Programme's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), drew attention to the soon-to-be-launched LAC Coalition on Circular Economy that will aim to develop a common regional vision and approach. She commented that the region has been very active in promoting the circular economy, with such countries as Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico and Costa Rica already developing strategies, plans or roadmaps for a circular economy.

Finally, Gladys Okine Ahovi, Executive Lead at the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity, focused on the ways in which legislators could involve more youth when exploring the topic of a circular economy, and on the importance of allowing youth to frame the discussion during meetings and consultations.

Closing Remarks

Bahamian Senator Ranard Henfield, who is Vice-President–Caribbean of ParlAmericas' Open Parliament Network, provided closing remarks. After thanking the hosts, panellists and other participants, he said that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed “cracks” in socio-economic systems and shown the need for greater resilience. According to him, while everyone may be “in the same storm,” people are “in different boats,” and individual success depends on national and regional success.

Senator Henfield emphasized that individual success depends on national and regional success, and stressed the importance of governments co-creating policies not just with “politically well-connected groups,” but also with women, youth, Indigenous people and individuals from all other communities. He concluded by noting that a green economic recovery is essential for a more equitable and environmentally sound future.

Plenary Session – November 27, 2020

Opening Remarks

Jorge Luis Fonseca, Vice-President of Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly, welcomed participants and described some challenges that Costa Rica has faced in maintaining legislative functions during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also noted that the reduced economic activity resulting from the implementation of measures designed to stop the spread of the COVID-19v virus has led to lower tax revenue, making it difficult for some governments to cover their fixed costs.

According to Mr. Fonseca, during the pandemic, countries for which the service sector is important have experienced job losses, as well as lower tax revenue and a reduced ability for governments to provide social services and other supports. He pointed out that the pandemic has shown the value of shifting from a traditional economic model based on

consumption of finite resources to a sustainable model that is based on the well-being of communities and that permits the regeneration of services and goods. In his view, legislators have a responsibility to ensure that today's actions differ from those that were taken prior to the pandemic.

Ms. Cabezas also welcomed participants and thanked the hosts before summarizing the activities that together comprised ParlAmericas' 17th Plenary Assembly. As well, she explained the ways in which the concept of a circular economy connects with the SDGs, and stressed the importance of international coordination as countries work to improve their environmental sustainability.

Introduction by the Moderator

María Inés Solís, member of Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly and member of ParlAmericas' Board of Directors, moderated the session. She made comments about the growth that could occur with a circular economic model, and highlighted the potential for a circular economy to be a pathway to achieving the SDGs. Ms. Solís then asked legislators to present their countries' experiences and best practices in the transition to a circular economy, and to indicate the ways in which transition measures may be included in economic recovery efforts.

Legislative Presentations

One legislator from each legislature attending ParlAmericas' 17th Plenary Assembly provided a brief update about initiatives in their country relating to either a circular economy and/or a sustainable and equitable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who made presentations included:

- Ms. Alincia Williams-Grant, Speaker of Antigua and Barbuda's Senate;
- Mr. Reginald Farley, Speaker of Barbados' Senate;
- Bolivian Senator Eva Humerez;
- Mr. Serré, Member of Parliament, House of Commons, Canada;
- Mr. Javier Macaya, member of Chile's Parliament;
- Mr. Germán Blanco, Speaker of Colombia's House of Representatives;
- Ms. Ana Lucía Delgado, member of Costa Rica's Parliament;
- Mr. César Litardo, Speaker of Ecuador's National Assembly;
- Mr. Manzoor Nadir, Speaker of Guyana's National Assembly;
- Haitian Senator Patrice Dumont;
- Senator Longmore;
- Mexican Senator Verónica Camino;
- Ms. Soraya Pérez Munguía, member of Mexico's Chamber of Deputies;
- Ms. Arling Alonso, member of Nicaragua's Parliament;
- Mr. Edison Broce, member of Panama's Parliament;

- Paraguayan Senator Amado Florentín;
- Mr. Rolando Ruíz, member of Peru’s Congress;
- Mr. Andy Daniel, Speaker of Saint Lucia’s House of Assembly;
- Mr. Marinus Bee, Chairperson of Suriname’s National Assembly;
- Trinidadian Senator Randall Mitchell; and
- Ms. Delsa Solórzano, member of Venezuela’s Parliament.

Closing

Following the sessions, the 17th Plenary Assembly’s [declaration](#) was read and adopted. As well, the results of elections were announced, as was Chile’s selection as host of the 18th Plenary Assembly. It was noted that 2021 would be the 20th anniversary of ParlAmericas and that several activities were being planned.

Finally, thanks were given to Ms. Cabezas – outgoing President of ParlAmericas – for her work and leadership. A welcome was then given to Paraguayan Senator Blanca Ovelar, incoming President of ParlAmericas, and to Ms. Anisette-George, incoming Vice-President of ParlAmericas. Remarks from Ms. Anisette-George were read, and Ms. Cabezas and Senator Ovelar provided final closing comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marc G. Serré, MP
 President, Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	17 th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly
DESTINATION	Videoconference
DATES	November 16 and 27, 2020
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rosa Galvez Hon. Kim Pate
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Marc G. Serré Hon. Steven Blaney Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay

STAFF

Ms. Julie Pelletier
Ms. Alison Clegg

TRANSPORTATION	0.00
ACCOMMODATION	0.00
HOSPITALITY	0.00
PER DIEMS	0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	0.00
TOTAL	0.00