

The Role of Parliaments as Drivers of Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)

Voluntary Submission to the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) in response to the mandate of UNFCCC Decision 15/CP.25, paragraph 2, offering recommendations on future work to enhance the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement on behalf of [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#), [ParlAmericas](#) and [GLOBE International](#)

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), ParlAmericas and GLOBE International salute the [recognition by the UNFCCC in 2016](#) of parliamentary organisations as an informal NGO group even if outside the nine Major Groups¹, alongside educational NGOs and faith-based groups, as a first step towards the full recognition of the critical role that parliaments play in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and national climate goals.

Ever since the passage of the world's first national climate law by the UK parliament in 2008, the role of parliaments in formulating laws, providing scrutiny, and approving budgets has become more widely understood. In 2015, GLOBE International translated their role directly into UNFCCC parlance by coining the phrase that parliaments are the best arbiters of MRV (monitoring, reporting and verification) for national climate targets, as no other entity can match their constitutional role in holding the executive to account.

While this function is rightly the core business of parliaments, in this submission we point out that parliaments and parliamentarians must also play a role in advancing the six pillars of the **Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)** agenda of education, training, public participation, public awareness, public access to information and international cooperation.

Parliaments can support ACE by proposing legislative or regulatory enactments that:

- *Strengthen* freedom of information and public access to information, with specific qualifications related to climate data, to support citizen understanding and engagement on climate issues.
- *Ensure* public consultation in the development of climate plans.
- *Ensure* on-going public communication on climate related issues.
- *Promote* or enable climate education, skills development, and training, at all education levels and in public administrations, in collaboration with the private sector as appropriate.
- *Fund* appropriately public education and training on climate change and other critical environmental issues
- *Establish* independent bodies (agencies, commissions, committees, etc.) that oversee or undertake ACE implementation.

¹ In contrast to e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which [identified Parliamentarians as a major group since its inception](#).

Parliaments, parliamentary committees, parliamentary groups, or individual parliamentarians can support ACE by:

- *Calling* on government to promote a stronger and more ambitious framework for ACE reporting and monitoring at UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.
- *Calling* on the government to adopt multi-annual national ACE strategies, as well as ensuring that these strategies:
 - inform the formulation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs);
 - are integrated as major building blocks of national action plans on climate;
 - align with existing Environmental Democracy international guidelines and agreements, such as: the [Bali Guidelines](#) for the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration; the [Escazú Agreement](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean; the [Aarhus Convention](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Europe; as well as with commitments under the [Open Government Partnership](#); and
 - contribute to the implementation of related action plans;
 - are communicated to the UNFCCC as part of updated Nationally Determined Contributions;
 - are adequately resourced, through the exercise of their budgetary powers; and
 - delivered.
- *Holding public hearings and conducting inquiries* on implementation of ACE, as well as on other climate and environmental issues
- *Overseeing* that ACE targets are adequately accounted in state annual appropriations, locally and nationally.

Parliaments can also support ACE by:

- *Serving* as delivery partners of the national ACE work plans, e.g., communicating information on legislative work related to climate issues with constituents on an ongoing basis.
- *Institutionalising* deliberative forums and initiatives for soliciting inclusive public inputs on climate legislation, such as citizens assemblies, including with youth constituencies.
- *Conducting* pre- and post-legislative scrutiny that reviews the degree to which environmental policy can be, or is being, enacted (i) with an intersectional lens; (ii) responds to the needs of traditionally marginalised populations; and (iii) does not exacerbate inequalities.

Around the world, Parliaments are already advancing ACE in a variety of ways:

Argentina: The Congress of Argentina has [adopted](#) a [Law on Environmental Education](#) which will create a National Strategy on Environmental Education based on a set of principles. Recently, the Congress of Argentina has also approved the [Environmental Legislative Forum](#) which has the objective of holding a series of roundtable discussions on different environmental issues between parliamentarians, relevant organizations, and civil society, with the goal of co-creating bills that address the climate crisis.

Canada: In June 2021, the Parliament of Canada adopted the [Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act](#) that establishes a legally-binding process for Canada to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emission by the year 2050. This law requires that an emissions reduction plan, progress report and assessment report for each target be tabled in each House of Parliament, provides for public participation, and establishes other reporting requirements to oversee progress towards achieving these objectives.

Colombia: The Government of Colombia has adopted a [National Strategy of Education, Formation, and Public Sensibilization on Climate Change](#) which complements the General Law on Education.

Dominican Republic: The Congress of the Dominican Republic participated in the development of their [National Strategy to Strengthen Human Resource and Capacity to Advance a Green Development with Low Emissions and Climate Resilience](#). The country also benefits from a [Gender and Climate Change Action Plan](#) which recognizes the link between gender and climate change and provides strategies to address this relationship within climate commitments. It includes actions that would involve the Congress.

El Salvador: The Government of El Salvador has adopted a [National Policy on Environmental Education](#), which considers the references made to environmental education in other related national environmental laws.

Grenada: Representatives of the Parliament were consulted to develop the [Gender Equality Policy Action Plan](#) which integrates climate action, and identifies related policies that should integrate a gender lens.

Kenya: The Parliamentary Caucus on Renewable Energy and Climate Change (PANEREC) is mobilising resources to have regular meetings with local representatives from County Assemblies, bridging the participation gap between different levels of government, to strengthen the understanding of local issues affecting climate action, and catalyse climate action on the ground.

Pakistan: The Climate Change Committee of Pakistan's National Assembly has advanced a comprehensive package of ACE practices with the support of WFD. It has adopted a guide for engagement with civil society organisations and put in place [a range of public engagement tools on its website](#), such as public petitions, public hearings, an expert database, and a platform to share research on matters related to climate change. In addition, it adopted a year-long work plan proposed and voted upon by climate experts including academia, think-tanks, and community groups.

Panama: The National Assembly of Panama through the [National Directorate for the Promotion of Citizen Participation](#) has the mandate to promote the submission of citizen proposals and opinion on governmental oversight.

Saint Lucia: The government of Saint Lucia created a [Climate Change Communication Strategy: Under the National Adaptation Planning Process](#) to provide short and mid-term advice on how the Government can use strategic communications to support the NAP, including the Members of the Senate and the House of Assembly.

United Kingdom: Six Select Committees of the House of Commons commissioned the [Climate Assembly UK](#) in June 2019 to understand public preferences on how the UK should tackle climate change because of the impact these decisions will have on people's lives. The six committees involved were: [Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#); [Environmental Audit](#); [Housing, Communities and Local Government](#); [Science and Technology](#); [Transport](#); and [Treasury](#). The Assembly brought together 108 people representing a diversity of backgrounds and experiences from across the UK to examine the question: "How should the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?". The assembly met for six weekends between late January and mid-May 2020 and published its [final report, The Path to Net Zero](#), in September 2020. The report shows how a representative sample of



the population believe the UK should meet its net zero emissions commitment with detailed recommendations across ten areas including: travel, food and land use, consumption, heat and energy use in the home, electricity generation and greenhouse gas removals. The committees aim to use the Assembly's results to inform their work in scrutinising government.

UNFCCC COP26: Following the UK adoption of the world's first net zero law, GLOBE International instituted annual [Student-MP Climate Surgeries in London to promote ACE](#), political education and civic dialogue between young people and their elected representatives. Ahead of COP26, these Student-MP Climate Surgeries will take place across Scotland, in partnership with Scotland's children and youth parliaments. The results will be shared at the beginning of the [GLOBE COP26 Legislators Summit](#) at the Scottish Parliament.