



Parliamentarians for Global Action
Acción Mundial de Parlamentarios
Action Mondiale des Parlementaires

**Environmental Health Initiatives: Innovative Approaches
for Building Sustainable Cities
Concept Note**

Tuesday April 24, 2012
1:15 – 2:45 p.m.

Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) is collaborating with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) to organize a Side Event on Environmental Health Initiatives: Innovative Approaches for Building Sustainable Cities during the Informal Consultations on the Zero Draft of the Outcome Document taking place from April 23 to May 4, 2012 in New York.

2012 marks twenty years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Earth Summit, held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, when 108 Heads of State and Government, and representatives from international agencies and non-governmental organizations, from across the globe, met to discuss issues of sustainable development. The Earth Summit arrived at Agenda 21, an action plan for a sustainable future. This year they will meet again to discuss the progress achieved during these twenty years, issues of concern and ways forward in achieving the goals set in Agenda 21. The Rio+20 conference provides an opportunity to review the progress made in the path of sustainable development, identify the implementation gaps and come with a menu of options on what needs to be done nationally and through international cooperation.

As reiterated by the U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “We need everyone — government ministers and policymakers, business and civil society leaders, and young people — to work together to transform our economies, to place our societies on a more just and equitable footing, and to protect the resources and ecosystems on which our shared future depends.” Legislators have played a key role in ensuring that the commitments of Agenda 21 are put into practice.

In the early 1990s, only a few countries had renewable energy policies. By early 2011, the number of countries where renewable energy legislation had been passed more than doubled to 118 states. Renewable energy targets for shares of electricity, renewable energy shares of total primary or final energy, share of heat supply, installed capacities of specific technologies, and shares of biofuels in road transport fuels have been integrated into laws in at least 96 countries, more than half of which are developing countries. By early 2011, at least 61 countries had adopted the feed-in tariffs (also called premium payments, advanced renewable tariffs, and minimum price standards), more than half of which had been enacted since 2005.

Some examples of renewable energy parliamentary initiatives include: legislation for South Africa’s 1 million new SWH installations by 2014; Guatemala’s tax breaks on equipment to project developers in its aim to generate 60% of total electricity from hydro and geothermal by 2022; India aiming to

increase its 2013 target of grid-connected renewable capacity from 10 MW to 1,000 MW of solar power and by 2020 to 20,000 MW.

At the regional level, the EU 2009 Renewables Directive and the Mediterranean Solar Plan also promote the usage of renewable energy in the regions. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have called for binding targets to increase energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2020, in exchange for greater flexibility in meeting this overall goal. Additionally, they have recently adopted a regulation controlling the emissions of atmospheric pollutants from motor vehicles (Euro 5).

By 2050 over two-thirds of the world population will be living in urban areas. Today cities are already responsible for around two thirds of the energy used, 60 percent of all water consumed and 70 percent of all greenhouse gases produced worldwide. In order to meet the challenge of urbanization in the world of scarce resources and environmental degradation, cities must implement integrated sustainability policies, increase resource-efficiency, become bio-diverse, move toward climate neutrality, create a resilient community, green their infrastructure, and transition to a green urban economy. Building a sustainable city requires a holistic effort that will involve improving the sustainability of various elements constituting the city: its water infrastructure, transportation systems, architectural, housing and construction practices, sanitation and waste management services, energy sustainability and healthcare, among others. To this end, legislators need to ensure relevant policies and laws are implemented to ensure health and well-being of their constituents, while preserving the severely depleted and finite natural resources available.

Considering the widening gap between the resource demands of growing populations and economies, on the one hand, and declining natural resource base and carrying capacity, on the other hand, urban systems, which until now have been extractive, resource consuming systems, need to themselves be redesigned and managed to produce more and more of their own resource inputs. Put in economic terms, cities need to be even more productive engines of economic growth by 'growing' a substantial part of their own resource (water, energy, food) base.

The purpose of this Side Event is to contribute to the discussions on Sustainable Cities toward the Rio+20 Conference by discussing the challenges faced by modern cities and possible solutions to these challenges. The Side Event will highlight innovative approaches to environmental health that help reduce the adverse effects on urban populations, as well as the importance of national parliaments in furthering sustainable development.

The Side Event will cover the following issues:

- Relevant country experiences on drafting and implementing clean air initiatives to tackle air pollution in the cities;
- Concrete recommendations to improve health and quality of life indicators;
- National and local strategies for smart urban planning – connecting the three pillars;
- Risks of environmental pollution on health;
- Holistic approach to sustainable city building and best practices (sustainable architecture and building projects, clean air and clean water projects, etc).

Parliamentarians for Global Action is a non-profit, non-partisan network of over 1,000 legislators from 131 elected parliaments around the globe committed to promoting peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development and population issues by informing, convening, and mobilizing parliamentarians to realize these goals.