GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SECRETARIAT
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

49th Legislature
Fourth Period

SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR THE FUTURE

Distribution: 114/2023

File S/C

December 12, 2023

EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

Visit

Verbatim record of the meeting held on
December 12, 2023

ATTENDANCE

Chair: Legislator Rodrigo Goñi (Chair)
Member: Legislator Carmen Sanguinetti
Guests: From the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): Mahsa Jafari, Dalita Balassanian, Horst Rutsch, Tanvi Mani, Maritza Chan Valverde, Martin Kimani Mbugua, Muhammad Abdul Muhith, Sergiy Kyslytsya and Alfonso Fernández de Castro
Secretariat: Mr. Vladimir De Bellis (Secretary) and Ms. Sofía Martorano (Deputy Secretary)

SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR THE FUTURE

(Meeting of December 12, 2023)

(The Board of the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, is in attendance)

THE CHAIR (Rodrigo Goñi Reyes).—A quorum being present, the meeting is called to order.

(The time is 15:12)

—We have a fifteen-minute presentation and then we will visit the Vice President of the Republic, who also presides over the General Assembly. It is the same person.

First of all, thank you very much for your support, which was very important and relevant in developing our experience—allow me to introduce Lydia Garrido, our consultant—and also for UNDP's support.

I asked Lydia to give us a brief presentation on our process, which has been a short one. Parliament's Special Committee for the Future began in 2021; only two years have passed. We believe we have been able to gain experience quickly. We had very good results, not only within this Parliament but in other parliaments, for example at the recent Summit we held in September.

Allow me to introduce Senator Carmen Sanguinetti.

MS. GARRIDO (Lydia) (Interpreted from English).—The presentation is in Spanish, but we will deliver it in English.

(The presentation is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation)

—This is a very brief presentation on activities from 2021 to the present.

The main aim of the Committee for the Future is to contribute to the Parliament of the twenty-first century, focusing on anticipatory governance as a collective intelligence system. The foundation is to ensure that decision-makers have quality information and to strengthen anticipatory capabilities. To that end, we have robust, innovative methodologies for building on a scientific basis. Their methodology places a strong emphasis on creating collective knowledge and designing products that allow us to show how we connect people and purposes, seeking to build knowledge and information as the key to the approach.

This began in September 2021, and here we are, immersed in that process.

Here we have a photograph of the Summit. We invited all the 2022–2023 parliamentarians from the world's parliaments to the Committee for the Future, and we are very proud of the results. We have more than three hundred parliamentarians and experts from almost seventy countries, as well as six hundred participants in parallel activities. We also have

representatives of academia from our country and other countries, businesses, artificial intelligence experts and multilateral organizations.
This map shows the countries that took part, and you can see that we have very strong participation from around the world.
We will go through this very quickly to show you that we began organizing the Summit in October last year. So we had a year to organize it. It was an extremely important collective intelligence process for strengthening networks and awareness of anticipatory capabilities—the practice of anticipatory governance.

Just so you can see the images: here, besides working on the Summit, we worked in parallel to achieve a body of robust knowledge for the Committee for the Future's study of developments concerning the future of work and the work of the future. In this case, because of the Summit's theme—artificial intelligence—it was under the heading of the Committee for the Future in the context of the evolution of artificial intelligence.
So we have many ideas to contribute to the study of work, including artificial intelligence.

A new Summit is planned for 2024, bringing together and organizing all the knowledge we have gathered.

During the Summit we also had keynote speakers, and we organized workshops and meetings, which are important as well.

We will be finishing by obtaining the latest publications on work, as well as with a program to continue training in anticipatory governance.

MS. SANGUINETTI (Carmen) (Interpreted from English).—First of all, thank you for being here, and apologies for being late, as I have just finished in another Committee.

I would like to add a couple of things. I think it is important for you to have the perspective that, in the Uruguayan Parliament, the Committee for the Future is one of the committees where best practices are taking place. Our scale as a country allows us to maintain very fluid conversations with academia. I think it was an excellent example for all the work we do here, and I certainly want to endorse what Lydia Garrido and Rodrigo Goñi said at the Summit committee, with people from so many countries. What we saw in Finland was an open invitation. The level of the conversation was very inspiring and very interesting. I think the bar we set was very high. It is very interesting that we are working with next year in mind.

Thank you for your support and for the impact of the work you are doing. Of course, this reaches beyond our country and was very inspiring for the rest of the world.

THE CHAIR.—Our process has been short, because we began in 2021, but as you saw in the presentation, it has been very intensive and productive. The objectives we set were achieved. We were

discovering positive effects that we had not expected to be the most important. One of them is what we began discussing over lunch: at the parliamentary level, being able to bring in other actors who are very important in today's world—for example, the entire artificial intelligence ecosystem and new technologies, which we continually integrate into the Committee—but also the younger generations, who, we are convinced, provide tremendous impetus. They drive things politically. They have great strength. And because these are the issues they care about most, they have really managed to extend this into society, which I think is an example to follow. Committees for the future need to integrate the younger generations more, because they know more than we do about what is coming and because today they have that extraordinary communicative power.

The other issue we were sharing with you is this. In a polarized world—parliaments are very polarized—this Committee for the Future allows us to put forward issues that compel us to reach agreement. That is one of the great advantages we have seen here.

Finally—and this is why we would like UNDP to continue supporting us—anticipation cannot be improvised. A methodology must be used, and it has to be learned. Some may find it easier to learn. Parliaments in developed countries may find that learning easier. In Latin America, for example, many parliaments have asked us to share what we have been learning. Why? To put that anticipatory dynamic into practice, which, I repeat, has methodological requirements that we have been learning and, above all, applying. In other words, in two years we have demonstrated that doing what we are doing is a real possibility. We are going to continue. Right now, in 2023, the evolution of artificial intelligence has exploded. That makes it possible to address a huge number of parliamentary and social issues from an anticipatory perspective. Uruguay has been promoting, especially at UN level, the involvement of parliaments in this discussion, as you said. It is crucial. Why? Because of what happens to us in Latin America. When certain issues are discussed only at executive-government level, some perspectives are not on the table, and what was discussed at a wonderful Summit does not subsequently reach the rest of society. Parliaments have that possibility. That is why Uruguay, I repeat, made a proposal this Monday, December 11, for parliaments to become involved through committees for the future. Parliamentary groups working in this way already exist in several countries and are spreading.

That is our experience. We are especially grateful that UNDP supported us from the very beginning. Why was that important? Not only for financial reasons, but because it was essential to undertake these processes with an outside actor advising us, rather than solely from within Parliament. That is why Lydia Garrido was hired by UNDP, which gave all parties assurance that the process was being led from there.

That is why we want to continue this process with UNDP for at least one more year—hopefully longer—and could conclude it at the end of 2024.

MR. FERNÁNDEZ DE CASTRO (Alfonso).—First of all, I want to express my thanks through Chair Rodrigo Goñi and Senator Carmen

Sanguinetti. For us, it is a pleasure and an honor to support this process. As our UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner always says, “A matter of choice”: development is a matter of decisions, and in this case Uruguay decided, and its decision was to prepare for the future. With that vision, it began down a path that has uncertainties of its own, as Lydia Garrido was telling us. Clearly, methodology is needed, but so is the courage to venture into a new space. For us, since 2021, this has truly been an honor and a learning experience. I think it is important to highlight this fundamental element. It is as we have discussed many times. We hope to contribute, but we learn a great deal in this joint work, which then becomes part of what we can take elsewhere, just as we can bring here other experiences we have learned from in other places.

I think that, as of today, what we have learned together—such as the approach of bringing in different, distinct voices; in the first cycle the topic was the future of work and the work of the future—is something that will remain a work in progress. That construction is continuous, and we have to find a way to synthesize and share it. At the latest Summit of the Future, one of the elements already being worked on was the guide. As a guide, it will remain under development, informed by the learning and the network. There is a commitment to place this at the service or disposal of other countries through UNDP, which is, after all, a development network that belongs to countries and draws on different countries’ experiences and perspectives. So you can count on our commitment to continue supporting you.

Thank you very much.

MR. KIMANI MBUGUA (Martin) (Interpreted from English).—I do not want to speak for too long, but I do want to thank the legislators for their presence in the House of the People.

I think I do politics and you do politics. In another sense, when policies turn into politicking, there can be problems.
I would like to understand how the Committee for the Future works, what the specific legislation is like when seeking answers to what people want today with the future in mind, how you navigate politically and what resources you use.

MS. SANGUINETTI (Carmen) (Interpreted from English).—It is an interesting question. When I began participating in the Committee for the Future, I remember that at many events this idea arose of thinking about the quickest way to connect with people’s future—not just the people out there, their children and grandchildren, but the generation of the future. UNDP has interesting work on the need to support an agenda of issues that affect future generations. There are other things one could say in response to your question, but that is the most concrete way of connecting with the future.

THE CHAIR.—There are two main areas for bringing the future into the present, for example concerning the laws being discussed. This year, 2023, we debated and passed social security reform. In the Committee for the Future, we had worked on what it means to have a

society with ever-increasing life expectancy. It was one of the conclusions of our first study. If we had seen that our societies are increasingly long-lived—as that first report showed—then when we discussed social security reform, the whole Parliament had already had access to that evidence and had a clearer understanding of the need to consider how to address social security in societies where people live longer and longer.

So we infuse many of the laws under discussion with that view of what is coming. What did we bring to the discussion? That our societies are living longer and longer; consequently, social security reform was influenced by this report.

Another conclusion from our work was that, as a society, we necessarily had to move toward lifelong learning. So we became involved in bills to reshape Uruguay's existing learning institutions for retraining—which had a more limited scope, aimed at workers who lose their jobs, a very small segment—so that they serve society as a whole on an ongoing basis. In other words, what used to be a small institute for retraining workers who became unemployed is now being reshaped into institutions that must provide a permanent learning service for all of society.

A great many people came through here. The first report was signed by more than 150 of Uruguay's most relevant stakeholders. All these insights, from the future to the present, allowed both legislation already underway and legislation that needed to be created to have that foundation. This is very important, because we enter legislative discussions with that view of what is coming, with emerging trends. All the legislation underway on digital regulation, including establishing a framework related to artificial intelligence, is also because our Committee for the Future reports showed that these major changes or trends are coming very soon.

I would say it ends up having a much greater impact than we would have imagined on major reforms that would otherwise have stalled. Moreover, because all political parties are represented on it, we are more willing to address more ambitious legislation that, without these reports, would seem bolder. When major State investments are proposed that apparently do not meet the most immediate need, if they appear here after being worked on by all parties, we see them as a very near-term reality. I do not know whether I have answered your question.

The Vice President is waiting for us.

MS. CHAN VALVERDE (Maritza).—Costa Rica and Uruguay have an extremely low birth rate, but when we talk about future generations, in our case we are not talking about young people or children, but older adults, who will be the majority. How have you incorporated that dimension into the Committee for the Future with regard to a population that will be mostly elderly?

From what I have observed, you are moving toward a National Artificial Intelligence Plan, with the potential to become the Artificial

Intelligence Center of the Americas, as indicated by UNDP's Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index. How have you been able to work toward that Index and consolidate it while reducing the digital divide? From what we saw and heard, with Plan Ceibal and Plan Ibirapitá, you now have 83% internet connectivity across the country. You are working toward narrowing the divide. Those are extremely high figures. What lessons could the rest of our countries learn in order to do what you are doing?

MS. SANGUINETTI.—With One Laptop per Child, Uruguay moved to the forefront and became a case study for the rest of the world. I think we have a success story there.

Regarding long-lived societies, the truth is that we learned with Lydia that it is not necessarily a bad thing, despite the stigma attached to it. Here I am speaking in a personal capacity, because I have studied quite a lot the policies that have failed almost everywhere in the world in their attempts to increase birth rates. I think France is the only country that did not manage to reverse it without stabilizing it. I think the way forward there has more to do with immigration. That is the direction we should pursue. Obviously, there is a certain number of people in the world and many countries will have that same policy, but this government has given some signals in that direction that I personally think should be taken further. I think that is the way to go.

I also think there is a paradigm shift with long-lived societies. We have made some modest progress from this Committee, but there is undoubtedly a great deal still to do.

THE CHAIR.—The Vice President of the Republic is waiting for us; we asked her to make room in her schedule to receive us. So, if you agree, let us continue the conversation with the Vice President.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

(The time is 15:53)