



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Second Committee of the General Assembly  
Agenda item 46: Information and communication technologies for development

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Madam Chairperson,

I am pleased to take the floor today and refer to the theme of information and communication technologies for development, from the perspective of the work and activities carried by the joint UN-IPU Global Centre for ICT in Parliament.

Through its very mandate, the Centre – established two years ago in December 2006, in follow up to the World Summit on Information Society - proposes to assist parliaments in tapping into the unique opportunities that ICT can provide in the development arena, as well as in the pursuit of democracy and good governance.

Earlier this year, the Board of the Global Centre invited all parliaments to hold discussions and hearings in parliament on the status of the information society in their respective country. They also called on parliaments to make all possible efforts to ensure that, by the year 2020, authoritative, timely and complete information on all stages of the legislative process in every country is publicly accessible on the Internet.

In May, the Global Centre brought together members of parliamentary committees dealing with ICT for the first time to provide a space for dialogue, where experiences and different perspectives could be shared. This parliamentary forum highlighted some common concerns, such as the need for an appropriate global response to cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism, while respecting fundamental rights such as the right to privacy. It also brought into evidence some national examples of parliamentary engagement that I would like to share with you.

A member of the ICT Steering Committee in the Senate of Rwanda noted that, despite the existence of numerous laws, such as the Telecoms Law, the Multi-sector Regulatory Law, and the Intellectual Property Rights Act, Rwanda still lacked an over-arching ICT Act that would cover areas such as e-Government Law, the Cyber Law on e-Security and e-Privacy. Although reliant on external resources in terms of financing, skills and expertise, parliament is taking the lead in the initiative to transform the challenges into opportunities. Rwanda is a landlocked country and could be a natural hub for marketing intangible goods - knowledge and information – in the region.

A member of the Science and Technology Committee in the Danish parliament discussed the role of the parliament in bringing the information society to all. In June 2006 a resolution was passed in parliament on introducing open standards in the public sector. Its purpose was to ensure a strategy for public purchase and use of software that benefit users, citizens and companies, and to ensure that the authorities' use of ICT support citizen's democratic rights to freely receive and send digital information to the authorities.

Following the resolution, an agreement between the Central and Local Governments and Danish Regions was reached and mandatory open standards for software in the public sector came into effect on 1 January 2008. The partners have agreed to continue focusing on standardization and the use of open standards in order to contribute to ensuring cohesion in the public sector, with a software market supporting competition, innovation and diversity, which will be of benefit to the development of e-government and all citizens.

These are just two examples of how parliaments are engaging with the Information Society, and how the Global Centre is seeking to build parliamentary capacity by identifying and sharing good practices and lessons learned.

The other activity of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament is to support parliamentary administrations in using modern technology to be more transparent, accessible and accountable, to make their law-making and oversight processes and functions more effective, and to empower people to be more engaged in public life. A major step was the publication of the first World e-Parliament Report in February 2008, a joint product of the IPU, the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. Based on data from 105 assemblies, the Report concludes that there is still a significant gap between what is possible with ICT and what has actually been accomplished by parliaments thus far.

Approximately, only 10% of the chambers surveyed are making extensive use of ICT. At the other end of the spectrum, the ability of many chambers is significantly constrained by resources, some to the point that they cannot yet provide even the most basic ICT services. At least 10% of chambers and parliaments appear to fall into this group, and, based on responses to a variety of survey questions, the percentage could be as high as 30%. The status of the ICT systems and services of those parliaments that fall between these two groups is uneven. Many of them have implemented ICT applications that serve some of their most important functions. But many of these applications appear to be operating at the lowest level of utility and have not been enhanced to take greater advantage of ICT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, or to offer additional services. Needless to say, one can draw some general conclusions from these figures about the use of ICT in public administration across the board.

In conclusion, Madam Chairperson, survey responses clearly demonstrate that most parliaments have plans to improve their use of technology to support their goals and their work. Nevertheless, narrowing the gap will require a significant increase in cooperation and coordination among parliaments, in partnership with the United Nations and other stakeholders.

The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament will continue to offer a forum where this dialogue, cooperation and coordination can take place.

Thank you.