



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly Agenda item 50: Information & communication technologies for development (27 October 2009)

STATEMENT by Ambassador Anda Filip, IPU Permanent Observer

Mr. Chairman,

New methods of communication between politicians, public institutions and citizens have become increasingly important in the governance of modern societies. As far as parliaments are concerned, despite the advances that have been made and the many experiments conducted, the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in fostering better communication between legislatures and the public is still an evolving issue. While a number of legislatures have already begun to make use of these new technologies, a great deal remains to be learned about how they can be employed most effectively to engage citizens in the political process.

It has become clear that additional approaches need to be found to assist parliaments in developing countries. While the sharing of knowledge among legislatures remains of paramount importance, more needs to be done to coordinate efforts among parliaments with advanced ICT structures who can share their technical expertise and convey their experiences to parliaments with fewer resources.

Likewise, improving the state of ICT in developing countries and emerging democracies would benefit significantly from integrating the financial resources of the international donor community more strategically within a comprehensive framework based on the principles of good governance and the recognition of the need to build reliable ICT infrastructures that will support the objective of reducing the technological gap among nations. From this perspective, ongoing attention is needed to ensure effective strategic planning, high level ICT management, quality staff training, the development of core systems for document management and the implementation of open standards.

The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament is the framework established by the IPU and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs to catalyse action among parliaments and development partners on these issues. I would like to be able to report on progress since my statement to this committee in 2008. While there have been some notable achievements, the challenges remain numerous.

The next edition of the World e-Parliament Report, to be launched in March 2010, will update the baseline of evidence on the use of ICT in parliaments. Although the results from the most recent survey are not yet available in full, it is likely they will show that although there has been some progress, parliaments in most developing countries are still far behind.

At its third high-level meeting in March 2009, the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament identified a set of forward-looking strategic goals for technology that can help foster development and democracy, and enable parliaments to become more effective and to play a significant role in support of the information society.

These goals are centred on five key areas that address both policy needs and technology requirements. These are:

- Establishing national and international policies to create an information society that is equitable and inclusive
- Enhancing the connection between legislatures and constituencies
- Improving the equality of access to the law and the lawmaking process of the country
- Ensuring that legislatures around the world can harness ICT tools in the service of the legislative, oversight, and representative functions
- Developing a more robust and well coordinated program of technical assistance.

Each strategic goal is supported by a set of well-defined and measurable objectives.

These will be further discussed and elaborated in the context of the third annual World e-Parliament Conference, scheduled to take place next week at the US Congress in Washington DC, under the auspices of the United Nations, the IPU, the US House of Representatives and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. The three-day conference, bringing together legislators and professional staff from over a hundred countries, will include a wide range of policy and technical sessions. One of the sessions on technology and governance, for example, will look at how the employment of new and innovative communication tools such as social media, text messaging and targeted emails have had a significant impact on electoral contests in several countries. Moreover, many of these techniques are being adopted by legislators at the national and regional levels in their efforts to reach out to citizens. It is becoming clear that ICT can help legislators (and public officials in general) be more responsive to the concerns of their constituents by using technology to listen to their views. This can, in turn, affect citizens' perceptions of the relevance, efficiency and legitimacy of public institutions, and of the legislature.

Mr. Chairman,

The political leaders represented on the Board of the Global Centre have called "on all parliaments, international organizations and development partners to unite their efforts around the same strategic goals as guiding principles for the international community to support all parliaments around the world to play a key role in shaping the society of the future and to harness modern technologies to become truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective institutions".

Achieving these goals will require concerted action that is only beginning to emerge today. Greater collaboration among parliaments; better integration of ICT with other support actions; and significantly enhanced coordination among providers are essential ingredients for success. Through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the IPU is working with the United Nations system, parliaments and other partners to make this a reality. We invite you to support this process by recognizing the strategic goals and lending your active support to their implementation.

Thank you.