REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED MEETINGS

(b)   THIRD PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON SHAPING THE INFORMATION SOCIETY "ICT AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS: CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES"

(Geneva, 3-5 May 2010)

1.   The Third Parliamentary Forum on Shaping the Information Society "ICT and Global Economic Crisis: Current Situation and Future Perspectives" was held from 3 to 5 May 2010 at the headquarters of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva, Switzerland. The event was co-organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), the IPU and the ITU, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. It was attended by delegations from 16 parliaments, as well as permanent missions to the United Nations and experts from other organizations.

2.   It was the third meeting of members of parliament focusing on issues relating to the Information Society. The aim of the Forum series is to further dialogue among legislators on parliamentary actions that can contribute to the shaping of the Information Society. The Third Parliamentary Forum highlighted some important policy issues for legislators in the current economic and social environment.

3.   Delegates underscored that broadband is a vital basic infrastructure, due to the size, growth and spin-off benefits of the online economy. Broadband investments are critical to narrow the broadband gap between urban and remote areas and to allow more people, especially in developing countries, to benefit from access to the Internet. However, the broadband capacity bottleneck of the current copper-based access infrastructure will be reached soon; more investments in fibre optic networks are needed. Although mobile networks can cover part of the demand for broadband access, particularly in the short term, their performance will always remain below that of the fixed network. A strategic approach requires a combination of fixed and mobile networks, with a long-term goal of developing a fibre-optic broadband infrastructure.

4.   Alongside the legal online economy, there is matching growth in the dark economy run by hackers and cyber-criminals leveraging the latest spam, malware and cyber-attack techniques. The far-reaching challenges posed by the new and greater volume of cyberthreats are likely only to be resolved at the global level. The efforts of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to facilitate a coordinated response addressing the challenges related to cybercrime are notable. Parliaments have a major role to play in this international effort due to their policymaking and legislative responsibilities, and ICT can be an effective tool to facilitate cooperation and the sharing of experiences among legislatures on this matter.

5.   Finally, the efforts of the United Nations system and other international organizations in documenting the different aspects of the Information Society are notable and represent an important source for policy-makers to make informed decisions. However, more should be done by national governments and the international system to collect reliable data to measure the economic and social impact of the development of the Information Society.