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Open Parliaments: Building an association on accountability

Interactive debate

Tuesday, 22 March 2016
9.30–11.30

“An open and transparent parliament” is one of the five criteria for democratic parliaments, as set out in the IPU guide *Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century*. Greater openness creates the possibility for citizens to hold parliaments and parliamentarians to account for their actions, and so make them more responsive to the people they represent. Greater openness also contributes directly to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and supports the achievement of all the Goals.

In recent years, there has been a clear trend towards greater openness in parliaments. Successive World e-Parliament Reports and Conferences have tracked parliamentary efforts to make more data available on their activities in a range of accessible formats. People are now able to get more information than ever before about what their parliament is doing, and is going to do. How citizens use this information is limited only by their imagination.

This openness in parliaments is one facet of a wider movement in favour of greater openness in public affairs. The Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative involving governments and civil society, was launched in 2011 and now has 69 member countries. The 2015 Open Government Partnership summit hosted by Mexico included for the first time a strand of work dedicated to legislative openness. During the summit, a session took place on the Open Parliament Action Plans, which are designed to strengthen the transparency of the legislative process and increase the involvement of citizens.

This interactive debate provides the opportunity for parliaments to build momentum in favour of greater parliamentary openness. Parliaments are invited to share their experiences in building political commitment to openness, developing tools, and working with partners to make parliamentary information available to citizens.

Parliamentarians will be invited to discuss the following key questions:

- Which parliaments have made a formal commitment to openness? What form has this commitment taken? What have parliaments committed to do? What has been the experience so far?
- What arguments would you use to convince parliaments that are still uncertain about the need for greater openness?
- Which tools have had the greatest impact? Has the commitment to openness led to changes in the way parliament does its work?
- What has been the public reaction to parliament's efforts to be more open? Has greater openness led to greater accountability? Have public perceptions of parliament changed, either positively or negatively?

