



THE USE OF MEDIA, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA, TO ENHANCE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Resolution adopted unanimously by the 128th IPU Assembly (Quito, 27 March 2013)

The 128th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Considering that dialogue between citizens and parliamentarians has the potential to foster greater respect for democracy and democratic institutions, thus countering declining voter participation and promoting greater accountability,

Taking note of the fact that traditional media, in particular those that respect professional standards of editorial independence, plurality and quality of information, continue to be a main source of information on parliament for much of the world's population,

Mindful of the fact that traditional media are facing challenges in responding to rapid technological and financial changes, which may affect their ability to provide information, including information about parliament, and noting that independent, pluralistic and quality media are fundamental for democratic processes,

Aware that increasing numbers of citizens and parliamentarians are using social media globally,

Cognizant of the possibilities offered by social media services for promoting the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms while underscoring that these same rights and freedoms, in particular the right to privacy and human dignity, may also be threatened on social networks,

Considering the potential of social media to facilitate greater citizen engagement through two-way interaction between parliamentarians and citizens,

Bearing in mind that media, including social media, may also enhance citizen engagement by allowing people to create networks, motivate each other, engage in monitoring activities, and contribute to the decision-making process,

Underscoring that parliamentary work should be explained to citizens in a comprehensible and attractive manner,

Affirming the need to enhance the participation and inclusion of women in the democratic process,

Also affirming the need to enhance youth participation and inclusion in the democratic process,

Further affirming the need to enhance the participation and inclusion of senior citizens in the democratic process, including their knowledge and use of social media,

Underscoring the potential of social media and recent information technology to enhance parliamentarians' engagement with youth and to raise awareness of the problems, needs and aspirations of youth,

Aware of the need to promote security in a digital society, particularly with regard to traditionally unprotected groups of people, such as the elderly or children and persons with a physical, mental and/or sensory disability,

Aiming to ensure that citizen engagement efforts do not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, socio-economic status, place of residence, disability, religious belief, ethnicity or political affiliation,

Convinced of the need to overcome digital divides, particularly in developing countries, which result when some groups and regions in society do not have the same access to information and communication technologies as others,

Also considering that the digital divide may impede citizens' access to information provided through social media, hence the importance of guaranteeing all citizens access to information technologies as well as using traditional media to keep the public informed,

Considering that citizens' ability to engage with parliamentarians depends partly on access to technology as well as their knowledge of parliament and parliamentary procedure,

Bearing in mind the irreplaceable nature of personal contact in the field for elected politicians,

Noting that there are difficulties in using social media to build a consensus by gathering various opinions in a balanced manner although they function well in disseminating a certain political opinion,

Underscoring the fact that fostering media and Internet literacy with regard to both traditional and new social media is an essential prerequisite for enhancing youth participation and inclusion in the political process,

Concerned that social media may also be used to send hate messages, sometimes anonymously, and allow people with malicious intentions to organize and mobilize others, which may undermine democracy and peace,

Underlining the importance of respecting laws regarding defamation and libel, with particular legislative efforts aimed at avoiding incitement to hatred,

Aware of the need to use social media responsibly, not only fully respecting prevailing legislation, but also the confidentiality, privacy and integrity aspects of the information dealt with,

Convinced of the very important role that media and press regulatory bodies can play in protecting human rights, particularly freedom of expression and the right to privacy,

Also convinced of the role that media and parliamentary press bodies can play in scaling up communication between parliament and the public,

Aware of the significant challenges that would be encountered in developing a universally enforceable code of conduct for social media users,

Encouraged that the IPU and the ASGP are working on social media guidelines for parliaments,

Convinced that parliamentarians need to share information about the potential of social media to enhance citizen engagement and representative democracy, its risks, and the technical requirements needed to realize its potential,

Mindful of the watchdog role of journalists in the political system and the need for journalists to be accountable to the public while following the codes of ethics of journalism,

Aware that journalists no longer have the monopoly on information dissemination, as users of social media generate content and information themselves,

Convinced that corruption represents a serious threat to the rule of law, democracy, human rights, equity and social justice,

Affirming that the right to freedom of expression should also be protected online, and bearing in mind that the enjoyment of this right carries with it special duties and responsibilities, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

Underscoring Article 20 paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which "Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred

that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law",

Recalling United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 20/8 of 29 June 2012 on "The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet",

1. *Recommends that parliaments develop strategies and guidelines for enhancing citizen engagement in the democratic process through the use of media, including social media;*
2. *Calls on the IPU to collect and make publicly available the guidelines developed by its Member Parliaments, and to develop best practices in the use of social media to enhance citizen engagement;*
3. *Encourages parliaments to include in those guidelines additional provisions that address the need for mutual respect among parliamentarians and between parliamentarians and the public when interacting through media, including social media;*
4. *Calls on parliaments to disseminate through the media, including social media, information on parliamentary business, debates and procedures with the aim of familiarizing citizens with them and making them more comprehensible, attractive and dynamic;*
5. *Encourages parliaments to use media, including social media, as part of a platform to interact with citizens, while ensuring that any social media engagement would not replace offline engagement, including through traditional media;*
6. *Urges parliaments and parliamentarians to ensure that their citizen engagement efforts are accessible to all regardless of gender, age, socio-economic status, place of residence, disability, religious belief, ethnicity or political affiliation;*
7. *Encourages parliaments to provide parliamentarians with the necessary information technology resources, assistance, training, equipment, technical support, access and any other forms of assistance to effectively use media, including social media, as a way of engaging with citizens;*
8. *Urges parliaments to take effective measures aimed at narrowing the digital divide, especially for developing countries where the majority of the population still does not have access to information technology resources;*
9. *Calls on all stakeholders to foster Internet and media literacy for all citizens, in particular children and young people, for example by developing and offering special educational and training programmes;*

10. *Urges parliaments and parliamentarians to respect the rights to freedom of expression, information and assembly, both online and offline;*
11. *Underscores that a free, open and accessible Internet is both a fundamental human right and a tool for citizens to enhance engagement and democracy, also underscores that parliamentarians must assume responsibility for ensuring that citizens have access to free and secure communications online;*
12. *Emphasizes that any regulation of the media must be consistent with international human rights obligations in relation to the right to freedom of expression;*
13. *Calls on all social media users to respect their country's laws regarding defamation and libel in accordance with international human rights law;*
14. *Also calls on all social media users to refrain from hate speech or incitement to violence in accordance with international human rights law;*
15. *Calls on parliaments to actively support and protect journalists and social media users, including bloggers, and defenders of the freedom of speech around the world;*
16. *Urges parliaments and parliamentarians to protect the right to freedom of expression and speech so as to facilitate journalists' watchdog role through traditional media and social media while respecting ethical codes, thereby enhancing democracy;*
17. *Further calls on parliaments to provide parliamentarians with information and assistance regarding legal and other issues pertaining to defamation, libel, the protection of privacy and confidentiality;*
18. *Invites parliaments to put in place, where necessary, regulations and procedures guaranteeing the rights of all persons using new information and communication technologies in a representative and participatory democracy;*
19. *Calls on parliamentarians to not only use new technologies safely, but also to promote such use by third parties and instil a culture of security in the use of social media;*
20. *Urges parliamentarians to work towards achieving a safer digital society, particularly with regard to the use of social networks;*
21. *Encourages the incorporation of social media and technologies into laws and regulations governing access to public information;*

22. *Also encourages parliaments and governments to adopt measures aimed at protecting press freedom, enhancing its transparency, strengthening its capacities and making it more democratic;*
23. *Urges parliamentarians, especially women parliamentarians, to use social media to support each other and interact with communities to enhance women's participation and inclusion in democratic processes;*
24. *Also urges parliamentarians to use social media to increase their engagement with youth and raise awareness of youth problems, needs and aspirations;*
25. *Invites parliaments to conduct a study of media coverage of parliament in their countries so as to gauge the importance of each type of media and each medium;*
26. *Urges the governments of countries that do not already have one to put in place an independent watchdog body to monitor the proper functioning of the freedom of expression and communication of the media and to prevent abuses and human rights violations that might result from the activity of communications professionals;*
27. *Encourages parliaments to diversify their means of communication by creating their own media bodies and by facilitating public access thereto;*
28. *Encourages parliaments and parliamentarians to establish and respect codes of ethics for communications and to recognize the need for discussions and mutual agreements on how political or other debates should be conducted.*