World e-Parliament Conference 2007
Challenges and benefits of ICT in parliamentary processes

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Background

In late 2005, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly lunched the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in Tunis on the occasion of the WSIS. Since then, a growing group of partners have supported the work the Global Centre to help respond to the common desire to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where legislatures are empowered to better fulfill their democratic functions through ICT tools placed at the service of the institutional process, citizen's access to Parliamentary activities, and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

By acting as a catalyst and clearing house for information, research, innovation and technology in Parliament, as well as a hub for technical assistance in this area, the Global Centre promotes a structured dialogue and cooperation among Parliaments and legislatures on the use of new technologies in parliamentary processes to greatly enhance the sharing of experiences, the identification of best practices and the implementation of technical solutions.

Several Parliaments have in fact successfully introduced and adopted ICT in their daily functions, and are already starting to notice significant improvements in their capacity to connect with the electorate, deal with high volumes of information, and conduct their business more efficiently. Yet, the transformation processes inherent to the introduction of ICT in the general conduct of Parliamentary business remain quite complex and can be a real challenge for those parliaments that have not embarked along this path.

Against this background, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament will organize the first *World e-Parliament Conference 2007 - Challenges and benefits of ICT in parliamentary processes* that would magnify the benefits of various activities undertaken in the area of ICT in different legislatures through inter-parliamentary cooperation and exchanges.

The *World e-Parliament Conference 2007* will facilitate the process of analyzing successful approaches and identifying good practices and lessons learned by encouraging Parliaments around the world to take advantage of the available results and concrete experiences and to debate the challenges and benefits provided by ICT in the modernization of Parliamentary processes.

Objectives and themes

The conference will try to address practices and concrete examples along four general themes: vision and leadership, processes and organizational challenges, systems and applications for parliamentary businesses, and participation.

1) Vision and leadership: The adoption of innovation and technologies in Parliament implies an important institutional transformation and complex decisions ranging from human resources development to greater transparency and accountability, and must therefore emanate from a *political decision*. Realizing the future as envisaged by policy-makers needs also well defined *strategic plans*, based on a building block approach and modular implementation that allows for greater *control* and flexibility of the *implementation process*. This requires, among others, to address the following issues:

• Why is political will and strategic vision essential for the effective development of ICT in Parliament?

• How and by whom should the strategic vision and plan be established, and what are their critical components?

• What is the potential value of common objectives and standards in an implementation plan?

• Is inter-institutional cooperation with the executive needed to better exploit common ICT practices?

2) Processes and organizational challenges: The introduction of ICT in Parliament touches *people* and *processes* throughout the *organization* and therefore it requires an *integral multi-stakeholder approach*, which can yield more commitment and support throughout the implementation process. The following questions need to be looked into:

• What are the roles and responsibilities of the members, officials, and ICT staff in parliamentary processes and how can ICT increase efficiencies and effectiveness within the organization?

• How can an adequate human resources and technical infrastructure be created and sustained?

• Who manages the process of organizational change and where are the priorities?

• How the legislative process and knowledge is managed within a parliament?

3) Systems and applications: The first wave of information and communication technologies was largely static and focused on information dissemination, with the flow of content moving prevalently from the source to the reader. In the last few years a new wave of applications has become predominant, focusing heavily on collaboration and sharing. At the same time, a strong movement toward the use of open standards and the sharing of open source software has emerged in the public sector, and especially in legislatures without a long legacy of ICT use. In this light, the Conference will try to address the following questions:

▪ What is the latest in terms of applications, approaches and collaborative efforts in parliaments around the world?

▪ What is the potential value of common objectives and standards?

▪ Are good practices available? What are the challenges for collaborative efforts, exchanges and information sharing?

4) Participation: The new dimension of innovative online applications and social networks, where people collaborate and share information, where the consumer/end user becomes the producer/co-producer, has been termed Web 2.0. The opportunities and challenges that this evolution poses to democratic institutions and also to the citizens have only now begun to emerge. Parliaments should not underestimate the political and social implications that Web 2.0 poses to their web presence and the opportunity that it can bring for good governance.

The Conference will explore ways in which Parliaments can take advantage of the technical and social opportunities provided by Web 2.0 technologies in their dialogue with citizens and constituencies. Some of the issues to be addressed include:

• Which technologies have been used to enhance or modernize Parliamentary processes and activities with regard to participation?

• What are the requirements, constraints and challenges of using Web 2.0 technologies in parliaments?

• What lessons can be learned from best practices in the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the context of dialoguing with the electorate and the civil society?

Conference format

The first World e-Parliament Conference will be held on 11 October 2006 in Geneva, Switzerland at the CICG (Geneva International Conference Centre). It will take place after the closing of the 117th IPU Assembly and of the ASGP meeting organized in Geneva by the respective institutions on 8, 9 and 10 October 2007 to facilitate the participation of interested legislators and secretaries general of parliaments.

It will be organized in plenary sessions, allowing ample time for interaction among participants.

Participants

It is expected that 300 to 400 participants will attend the World e-Parliament Conference 2007, including Members of Parliaments, Secretaries General of Parliament, staff and officials of parliaments, as well as representatives of international organizations, the donor community, businesses and the academia.

To ensure a balanced representation, all efforts will be made by the organizers to identify funds available for travels and accommodation of staff and officials from developing countries.

Languages

The working languages of the conference will be English, French and Spanish.

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