World e-Parliament Conference 2009
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Modern information and communication technology is essential to democracy and development. It can play a hugely important role in ensuring that parliament and political processes are accessible to the public and that people can influence political decisions. ICT is central to ensuring that work carried out in Parliament is effective, transparent and accessible and parliament and parliamentarians are accountable to the public.

Yet, there is a substantive gap in most parliaments between what is possible to achieve with ICT and what is being accomplished. Lack of resources is one cause of this problem. An absence of clear understanding among parliaments of what can actually be achieved is another. This has implications not only for the efficiency of parliamentary operations, but also for the quality of relations between parliament and citizens and therefore also of democracy itself.

The third World e-Parliament Conference in Washington D.C. from 3 to 5 November 2009, which was facilitated by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, addressed these challenges. It brought together four hundred elected members and staff of ninety-five parliaments.

Delegates discussed how to connect parliaments and citizens and how to strengthen parliaments through better use of ICT. They addressed the new social media and other internet based communication tools, including issues of security and reliability. They exchanged experiences of ICT strategic planning, ICT in legislative processes and parliamentary websites, to mention a few examples.

Some of the main conclusions that emerged during the debates:

▪ There is an opportunity for parliaments to engage a new generation of citizens for whom ICT is central to their way of life in political and parliamentary processes. In this way, their views could be heard and taken into account as parliaments debate and decide on major policies and legislations.

▪ The adoption of open standards will allow parliaments to be more transparent and accountable to citizens. Parliaments will also be better equipped to facilitate regional and global cooperation and integration. Many issues requiring legislative action in today's globalized world are in fact common problems that require concerted solutions.

▪ Access to information underpins citizens' involvement in political processes and indeed the work of members of parliament themselves. Members' enormous information needs can best be met by effective and well-resourced parliamentary library and research services making full use of new technologies for collecting, managing and sharing information.

The World e-Parliament Conference 2009 is an initiative of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, which was created by the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2006. The Board of the Global Centre met on the margins of the Conference to discuss its future work programme and to adopt the principles of a 10-year strategic plan for stimulating parliamentary action to develop modern information societies and expanding the use of ICT in parliaments.

The long-term goals advocated by the Global Centre cannot be achieved without greater involvement, cooperation and coordination among parliaments, governments, international organizations, academic institutions and donors. Inter-parliamentary cooperation in particular is a critical factor for success. Investing in ICT helps to strengthen parliaments, thereby advancing good governance and democracy and contributing to the attainment of internationally agreed development goals.