



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

World e-Parliament Conference 2014

Lessons learned and future horizons

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Co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the
National Assembly of the Republic of Korea



THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Opening remarks

Mr. Martin Chungong
Secretary General elect
Inter-Parliamentary Union

Seoul, 8 May 2014

Mr. Kang Chang-Hee, Speaker of the National Assembly,

Distinguished Speakers and Members of parliament,

Dear colleagues,

I welcome you to the World e-Parliament Conference 2014. I would like to express my profound gratitude to the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea for hosting this conference.

On behalf of the IPU, I would like to convey my sincere regret to the Republic of Korea for the tragedy which has recently beset the country. The loss of so many young lives is a terrible burden for a nation to bear. As a father myself, I can only imagine the pain that the families must be feeling, and indeed all the Korean people.

Dear colleagues,

This conference provides us with an opportunity to come together to share best practices, network with peers and build inter-parliamentary cooperation in the area of information and communication technology.

Let me ask you a question. Who has a smart phone or a tablet computer with them today? Please raise your hands.

Who had one in 2007? Now think about the citizens of your country, and ask yourselves the same questions.

What does this tell us about the way society is changing, the way people give and receive information, the way people interact and connect about the issues they care about? And what does this mean for parliaments – institutions whose working methods have their origins in the late nineteenth century or before and, some would argue, whose practices have evolved little since?

The institution that I represent, the IPU, has set out a vision for a set of standards for democratic parliaments in the twenty-first century. This vision is grounded in what parliaments themselves tell us about their challenges and their plans for the future. The IPU identifies five core values of democratic parliaments:

- A parliament that is representative of the social and political diversity in society, including women and young people
- A parliament that is open and transparent about its work
- A parliament that is accessible to the media and to citizens
- A parliament that is accountable to the people it represents
- A parliament that is effective in its law-making and oversight functions

These values are universal, although there are many possible ways to put them into practice. Each parliament is different, with its own history, culture and traditions. The specific practices will vary from parliament to parliament. But a parliament that does

not seek to epitomize these values runs the risk of not fulfilling the mandate that it has received from the people.

Public pressure on parliaments is great, and increasing. There is pressure to modernize the institution, not only in terms of the technology that it uses, but more fundamentally, in the way that parliament works. People want to be involved in the decisions that concern them. There is growing public desire to reduce the gap between parliament and citizens, to change the relationship between parliament and the executive, to rethink the role of political parties.

Parliaments are resilient, and they are responding to the pressures for change. There are examples of innovation in parliaments from every part of the world, and we will talk about some of these innovations this week. Many make use of technology, just as technology is becoming more pervasive in our societies. Some people argue that parliaments must transform themselves to become “e-parliaments”.

For the IPU, an e-parliament is... a parliament. One that uses technology as a tool to become more representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective. I insist: technology is a means, not an end in itself. Technology can help to develop strong parliaments. It can provide new channels for parliaments to connect with citizens. But it will not fix processes that do not work. It is a complement, not a substitute, to the hard questions about what it takes to strengthen parliament as an institution.

Allow me to explain why I insist on the need for strong parliaments. At the United Nations, a discussion is underway about the sustainable development agenda that the world's leaders will come together to adopt in September 2015, when the Millennium Development Goals expire.

The IPU is arguing that democratic governance must be a central feature of that sustainable development agenda. Strong institutions are the cornerstone of democratic governance. The experience of the MDGs shows that it is not possible to achieve progress towards key goals such as poverty eradication, education for all and access to healthcare, if strong institutions do not exist to channel people's needs into the policy-making process and to hold governments to account for their results. In other words, democratic governance is essential for sustainable development, and should be a goal in its own right in the sustainable development agenda.

The discussion at the UN is continuing, with some States arguing strongly in support of the inclusion of democratic governance, while others are hesitant or opposed to the idea. I call on all parliamentarians here today to engage discussions in their parliament about the position of their government on this issue, and to push for the inclusion of democratic governance in the sustainable development agenda.

Dear colleagues,

Think for a minute about how your parliament has changed in recent years, and about how your own relations with citizens have evolved. Every parliament – and I mean every single one, without exception – is being challenged to raise its game, and to adapt to the way people give and receive information.

We have seen new forms of political participation emerge, as people use social media to connect on issues across time and space.

We have seen revolutions take place, as people reject authoritarian forms of government, and demand greater transparency and participation. I welcome the presence at this conference of delegates from the parliaments of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, who come here to learn from other parliaments about new ways to engage citizens.

We have seen practices change, as members of parliament communicate with citizens on social media, as parliaments become 'paperless', as parliamentary web sites grow, as parliamentary documents become accessible in open formats.

We come here to draw the lessons from the experience gained so far, and to learn about the emerging trends. But we know that there is so much more to be done.

During the conference, we will hear from parliaments from every region of the world. I implore you to use this opportunity to learn from each other and to establish contacts with your peers. You can consider the conference to be a success if you go home with five new ideas and ten people that you can contact for advice when you get back to your parliament.

More than that, we can use this conference to sketch out a vision for the parliament of the future, and the role that technology will play in achieving it. I believe that we can work together to shape a common agenda for the development of e-parliaments, with measurable benchmarks against which we can evaluate progress.

Dear colleagues,

If there is one beauty of technology, it is that it can be reproduced infinitely. We are all learning all the time. But we do not need to begin from scratch. So many parliaments have so many things to share. This is an area where the scope for inter-parliamentary cooperation is huge.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in building this community of parliamentary experts. The Global Centre is a joint initiative of the IPU and the United Nations, which has organized the World e-Parliament Conference since 2007. Despite the difficult financial conditions which have forced the suspension of its activities, I hope means can be found to pursue the work of the Global Centre. In the meantime, the IPU is proud to organize this conference, in partnership with the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea.

If I had only one message for you today, it is that technology is a tool for strong parliaments that embody democratic values. Parliamentary openness and transparency are the preconditions for citizens to know what is being done in parliament and to have confidence and trust in the institution.

I believe that all of us are working for greater openness and transparency, whether we are technical experts or policy-makers. Through our efforts, I believe that we can modernize parliaments, by rethinking their working methods and using the tools of the twenty-first century. This requires leadership, skills and a certain amount of courage. As our smartphones remind us every day, society is changing, and we must continue to change too.

Thank you.