



# 3<sup>rd</sup> WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT

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## PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS ON THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

### (b) STRENGTHENING TRUST BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND THE PEOPLE

Rapporteur: Mr. Josep Dallères Codina, Speaker of the General Council, Andorra

Let us begin at the beginning. We mustn't forget why parliaments exist. Citizens have accepted to delegate power to parliaments to represent them. This mandate is based on public confidence. Parliamentarians therefore have a responsibility to account to their electorate on the way the mandate is exercised.

Yet in old and new democracies alike, public trust is often low in parliaments, political parties and indeed the entire political system. Money is often at the heart of the problem. A lack of transparency in political funding casts doubt over the integrity of decision-making processes. There are parliamentarians who place their personal interest above the common good. Easily-given promises that prove to be no more than hollow words damage public perceptions of politics. Of course a distinction should be made between the actions of individual members and those of parliament as a collective body.

Participants shared possible solutions. They insisted on the need for parliament to be representative of the society. Women, minorities, workers, the young, the poor, the disabled should be able to recognize themselves in the composition of parliaments. A parliament that is representative of the interests of all citizens gains in legitimacy.

Using technology to improve communications is another avenue that parliaments are exploring. Publishing voting records online, for example, gives citizens an important tool for holding members to account. As a participant put it, parliament should be a network of the people. Parliaments are still only beginning to avail themselves of the social networking opportunities offered by Facebook, Twitter and the rest.

Education on the workings of parliament and democracy is obviously essential. We heard of special initiatives taken to help children to become 'democracy-proficient'. Dialogue with young people is also vital.

There can however be a trade-off between the different values that a democratic parliament seeks to incarnate. Enhancing transparency by televising proceedings may sometimes have a negative impact on the effectiveness of parliamentary work. It can heighten the 'drama of politics' but may undermine the search for the difficult compromises that are at the heart of politics.

Ultimately, public trust may depend on respect for basic principles: respect for the other, and respect for the word that is given; total integrity and dedication to public service. Equally, the public will respect parliaments that are strong, that are seen to have influence over the legislative process and to exercise effective oversight of the executive and, in sum, to address the basic needs of the people in an efficient and timely manner.

In my opinion, it is not a vain statement to say that stronger parliaments lead to stronger democracies. I was impressed by the strong desire expressed by many participants to share good practices, including through a mechanism whereby parliaments can help one another to review their performance and share relevant experience.