UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE   INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

World Summit on the Information Society
Contribution to the Group of Friends of the Chair
by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

27 May 2005

The current focus of the process set in motion by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is to ensure implementation of the decisions taken at the summits in Geneva and Tunis. Parliaments need to be part of this process and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) can greatly facilitate their active involvement.

Parliaments have a constitutional mandate to adopt legislation, approve budgets, ratify international treaties and oversee government action in all areas - including in relation to information and communication technologies - and they have key responsibilities for enacting the legal framework that must underpin knowledge-based societies.

Parliaments are not only an essential element in the machinery of implementation, they are also a driving force in the construction of accessible, equitable and democratic knowledge-based societies. Indeed, such societies have the potential to strengthen democracy, since a well-informed population is better equipped to participate in democratic processes and make governance choices. For example:

- E-voting: Many parliaments are studying innovative uses of ICT to facilitate participation in electoral processes and to invigorate such processes. Electronic voting systems are being used in many countries, including France, Italy and the United States. Online voting via the Internet is also being widely explored as a means of encouraging inclusion and participation.

- Right of access to information: To date, more than 50 parliaments have adopted legislation ensuring the right of citizens to obtain access to information held by the State and in some cases by private interests. Access to information is one of the fundamental rights on which democracy is built, and parliaments are actively codifying this right into law, while applying the appropriate checks and balances.[1]

Proposed addition to Chapter 1 of the Operational Part

Insert the following at the end of paragraph 2, "National e-strategies"[2]:

We call upon parliaments to establish the enabling environment for national e-strategies by adopting the necessary legal framework, by approving the budgets required to finance national e-strategies and by effectively overseeing the implementation by government of such strategies.

Proposed addition to Chapter 4 of the Operational Part

Insert the following at the end of paragraph 26, "Follow-up mechanism for WSIS":

We request that parliaments, through their world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, be closely associated with this process.

About the Inter-Parliamentary Union:

The IPU is the international organization of parliaments of sovereign States. The Union is the focal point for worldwide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy. Over 140 national parliaments are currently Members of the IPU. Seven regional parliamentary assemblies are Associate Members.

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[1] On 17 November 2005, the IPU will co-organize with the Tunisian parliament an official side event to the Tunis phase of WSIS, where parliamentarians and other stakeholders will exchange experiences in the development and implementation of such legislation.

[2] In December 2003, a Parliamentary Panel within the framework of WSIS, entitled *Shaping an enabling normative environment for the Information Society: the role and responsibility of parliaments*, was organised by the IPU.