



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

United Nations Commission on
Science and Technology for Development

Tenth Session

Statement by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General

United Nations
Geneva, 21 May 2007

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I'm very pleased to join the Commission for the opening of its tenth session and would like to focus my remarks in relation to your new mandate as the focal point in the system-wide follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). I would like to address the topic from the perspective of parliaments and the role they can play in implementing the commitments made at WSIS and of the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in this area.

Mr. Chairman,

As we move forward with implementation, and as this Commission prepares its reports and recommendations for the Economic and Social Council, I would strongly recommend that we pay close attention to some of the basic principles of democratic governance, such as participation, transparency and accountability. These are the building blocks that underpin sound policy-making and they can help ensure that the policies are genuinely people-centred and development-oriented, provided of course that they also fully integrate gender as essential perspective against which to judge the implementation of WSIS commitments.

These are all areas where parliaments can be crucial partners as was amply demonstrated during the international conference on the role of parliaments in the development of the information society which took place in Rome in March of this year. If I may, I would like to share with you some of the conclusions of the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Fausto Bertinotti, as he summed up the proceedings of the event. He spoke of the following roles for parliament:

- *As a political guarantor against the technocratic risks of the Information Society*
- *As guarantor of the protection of socially weaker groups*
- *In protecting fundamental rights*
- *As an institutional guarantor*

The information society is bringing new opportunities but also new risks that require political choices to be made; that is to say, public debate, political guidelines, and the design of an appropriate institutional framework: parliaments have a central role to play in determining these political choices.

Major technological decisions should not be left to technicians, and technology policies cannot be dealt with sectorally and separately by specialists alone, but must be incorporated into comprehensive policy approaches.

The participation of parliaments in drawing up national policies targeted towards the development of the Information Society should serve as a guarantee in every country that these policies will be inclusive, sustainable and equitable.

Strong action by parliaments can prevent the spread of technologies from strengthening entrenched power, deepening long-standing inequalities and causing new ones, of which the digital divide is only the best known, to emerge.

New problems in relation to fundamental rights are emerging as a result of the development of the Information Society, and with them the need for new protections. Parliaments need to use their legislative and constitutional functions to strengthen the framework of rights, beginning with the right of access as a constituent element of citizenship, and as a precondition for ensuring that the extraordinary opportunities being opened up to produce and disseminate knowledge are not subjected solely to market laws but give rise to a new, global "common good".

Parliaments should also promote the use of the technologies to provide citizens with better information, not merely on legislative and other parliamentary activities but also as a condition for the exercise of "active citizenship";

Parliamentary initiatives to advance institutional transparency and accountability at all levels are both urgent and necessary, to make a diffuse control of government action possible, and to combat corruption.

Parliaments should become the institutional forum where the effects of the new technologies are constantly monitored and appraised in terms not only of economic development but also of the need to protect the values of the person and advance progress for the more deprived and disadvantaged sectors of society.

The commitment of parliaments to these issues can ensure that the need to combat crime and terrorism, and the demands of the economic system, do not give rise to the emergence of a society of surveillance, selection and control, interfering with the democratic nature of the political systems of which parliaments are the prime guarantors.

Mr. Chairman,

One of the actions taken by the IPU is the creation of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, in partnership with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. The Global Centre has two principle missions:

- To reinforce parliament's capacity to harness ICT tools to fulfil better their democratic functions
- To strengthen parliament's role in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and the attainment of internationally agreed development goals

The Global Centre offers a platform for exchanging information and expertise among parliaments, and building relations with other stakeholders. This Thursday, 24 May, IPU and UNDESA will co-organize a meeting of the Sub-Group on Parliaments and ICT under Action Line 1 (The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development). The meeting will bring together stakeholders from parliament and other organizations to exchange experience on concrete projects of technical assistance and the use of open source software in parliaments. We will also begin discussions on the first edition of the Global Report on CT in Parliament, which we believe could be a very useful tool for raising awareness. I would like to invite you all to attend or send representatives to this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

I fully measure the challenge that has been put to this Commission in its new role. May I reiterate that ICT is not an end in itself. In order to bring about a healthy information society that contributes to development, we must keep a strong focus on the democratic values such as participation, transparency and accountability. I would contend that parliaments are the institutional actors that are best placed to provide these guarantees.

The IPU would like to see this reflected in your outcome document. We would also like to see your Commission promoting and recommending greater attention being paid to good practice for action by parliament to bring the full force of democracy and democratic practices to the construction of the information society. Parliaments and the IPU are committed to assisting you in this task

Thank you.