



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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World e-Parliament Conference 2018

Parliaments, technology and innovation

3-5 December 2018

Geneva, Switzerland

#eParliament

Opening remarks by

Gabriela Cuevas Barron, IPU President

(delivered by Mr. Duarte Pacheco, Member of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal,
Chair of Twelve Plus Group)

3 December 2018

I would like to welcome everyone to this eighth World e-Parliament Conference. We are taking the next step in a series that since 2007 has brought together parliamentarians, senior parliamentary staff and experts from different communities to share experience and ideas about how parliaments use technology to make their institutions more effective and to build bridges with citizens. It is an excellent opportunity to learn about the latest developments in each of our parliaments and to think together about how we can do even better.

This Conference is placed under the title “Parliaments, technology and innovation”, and I believe that these are issues of the utmost concern and interest for our societies. Thanks to scientific research, we know more about the world today than at any time in history in the history of humanity. Every day, new research is published that pushes back the boundaries of our known universe just a little bit further.

This new knowledge in turn catalyses rapid innovation and technological change, which can be significant for human well-being and stimulate economic growth, among a wealth of other potential benefits. The development in recent decades of incredibly effective drugs and medical procedures which allow more people to lead healthy, productive lives is just one example.

In particular, the possibilities for connectivity and communication have grown immeasurably in recent years. Digitalization and big data offer new ways of creating innovative solutions, such as early warning systems to prevent violence, and empower young people and women to solve social issues through technology. They also present a great opportunity to make substantial progress in the areas of biology, renewable energy, financial technology. Some people argue that we are already experiencing a fourth industrial revolution, characterized by automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies, and including cyber-physical systems, the Internet of Things, cloud computing and cognitive computing.

I do not want to suggest that all scientific discoveries and technological innovations automatically lead to positive developments for society. Indeed, they also generate formidable ethical and societal questions. The manipulation of the human genome, the development of autonomous killer robots, and the implications of the use of artificial intelligence are just some of the challenges we must engage with. As politicians our role is to ensure that an inclusive dialogue takes place. We must also provide strong leadership to ensure that the fundamental principles and values that underpin our society are at the very centre of these debates.

The IPU looks at issues of technology and innovation through the multiple lenses of peace, sustainable development and democracy. Indeed, “Parliamentary leadership in promoting peace and development in the age of innovation and technological change” was the main topic at the IPU Assembly in October this year. We would do well to hear the words of the United Nations Secretary General, who reminded us in his message to the Assembly that we have the responsibility to “nurture a digital future that is safe and beneficial to all”.

The 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals highlight the key role of science, technology and innovation, not only for economic growth and prosperity but also for environmental protection, development and social inclusion.

Two weeks ago, parliamentarians from the Twelve Plus Group and East Asia met at the Israeli Knesset to examine how parliamentarians can mobilize science, technology and innovation to improve the lives of all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

They underlined that technological progress is a key factor in combatting poverty and climate change, and improving healthcare. Investing in scientific education, promoting research and innovation are key building blocks for a sustainable future, and parliaments can ensure that these investments are prioritized.

Colleagues,

If science, technology and innovation are transforming every aspect of human existence, then that also includes the way parliaments work. At a time when people are losing trust in their democratic institutions, new technologies can play a useful role in helping to rebuild that relationship. Parliaments need to harness the power of social media and new ways of communicating to reconnect with the people they represent.

Technology changes every day and that has also transformed the way we relate, we communicate, and without a doubt, it also transforms citizen expectations towards its parliamentarians. With a single "click", the world is closer to us and allows us to access information, goods and services almost immediately. Politics can not be left behind. The incorporation of new tools will allow us to consolidate our relationship with our representatives and strengthen our democracies with a more plural and inclusive vision.

We want to assume parliamentary leadership in technological innovation not only through our legislative function, but also by transforming our parliamentary processes and promoting a culture of engagement with our people.

I recommend to you a very interesting paper produced by the Knesset in preparation for the seminar, about Innovation in Parliaments and SDG16, and the manner in which innovation or innovative tools can help parliaments become more effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. I think that this is perhaps at the heart of our discussions this week.

When we talk about "innovation" in the parliamentary context, what we mean is the **adoption of new practices, products or services that change one or more aspects of parliament's operations or culture**. These practices do not necessarily need to be new or innovative in absolute terms.

Innovation encompasses the adoption of existing processes that were not previously used in parliament's work. This innovation is often driven, facilitated or supported by digital technology.

I want to underline two points: Firstly, that every parliament can innovate in its own context, regardless of the level of technological maturity. Secondly, that change is not the goal in itself; the purpose for innovation in parliament must be to strengthen the institution, to increase the level of transparency, accountability and responsiveness to our constituencies.

It is our responsibility to ensure that our parliaments are open and transparent institutions; that they are willing to consider changing the way they do business, such as the establishment of parliamentary committees on the future, or new tools for the legislative and oversight work of parliament.

Parliamentarians themselves are on the front line in having to find new ways to connect with citizens and to remain in step with society.

I am glad that the IPU is fostering these conversations. At the next IPU Assembly, the IPU's Committee on Democracy and Human Rights will hold a debate that follows up on recent resolutions on privacy in the digital era, the potential of social media to enhance citizen engagement in politics, and the fundamental importance of the right to freedom of expression. The conclusions from this week's work will certainly inform that debate, but I also hope that they will inspire you to take home new ideas to your parliaments.

I know that many things are happening during the conference this week. I would like though to reserve a special mention for the new Centre for Innovation in Parliament, which is being formally launched here today. It is our expectation that the Centre will become a platform for parliaments to work

together through a network of regional and thematic hubs to support parliamentary innovation through improved use of digital tools.

The Centre is a partnership between the IPU and parliaments. It could not have come into existence without the support from a core group of parliaments, including Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Zambia and the European Parliament. I would like to express my special thanks to these parliaments for their support, and I encourage every one of you to join this initiative so that the conversations that you will be having today can be nurtured and sustained when you go home, and that you can be leaders in looking at innovative ways to strengthen your parliaments.

Thank you.