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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for this opportunity to inform the Commission of progress made by parliaments in the implementation of outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society. I do not need to remind you of the central role that parliaments play in a democracy, nor of their unique constitutional functions to represent the people, to pass legislation, to adopt the national budget and to oversee the actions of the executive branch of government. These functions make parliament a pivotal player in the development of the information society.

Parliaments face a number of challenges when engaging with the information society. First, they tend not to be proactive institutions. They generally become engaged when proposals are presented to them from the executive, or when an issue achieves a high level of national interest. Second, in most legislative bodies it is difficult to organize the parliamentary process in ways that facilitate attention to interdisciplinary issues, such as those relating to the information society. Parliamentary committee structures are often based on the specific organization of governmental agencies or how the government's budget is presented. Yet there is a growing awareness that parliaments must strengthen their role in the realization of the diverse and inclusive environment articulated through the WSIS process.

Through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the IPU and the United Nations have sought to associate parliaments with the international processes in follow-up to WSIS, while encouraging them to play a strong role at national level. At a forum on '*The Role of Parliaments and Legislators in Shaping the Information Society*' in Geneva earlier this month, attended by representatives of 40 parliaments, parliamentarians expressed a number of concerns that I would like to share with you today:

- Public policies for the development of the information society should always be accompanied by the adequate budget that makes it possible to meet the targets that have been set;

- The search for a balance between competing interests, such as increased market liberalization, which can bring down prices of ICT goods and services, and the need for increased access to ICT in rural areas where demand is insufficient to attract private investment;

- The need for regulatory bodies that have a clearly defined mission, the resources to carry it out and the necessary degree of independence from the executive. In many countries, this independence has been ensured by making the regulatory bodies directly accountable to parliament;

- The need to set appropriate limits on the right of the executive to collect, store and use citizens' personal information. The fight against terrorism should not give governments a blank check to store data indefinitely, or to use it for other purposes than those expressly permitted by law. The risk exists that while trying to save democracy from terrorism, we may end up killing democracy itself;

- The need for increased cooperation at international level to prevent and punish misuse of the Internet, such as child pornography and online fraud. Although national legislations generally have provisions to deal with such crimes, the problem of extra-territoriality posed by the Internet can only be addressed at international level.

- The place of parliaments in the follow-up processes to the WSIS such as the Internet Governance Forum, whose multi-stakeholder nature is both very stimulating and very challenging for national parliaments.

These are just some of the issues that parliaments are facing today. IPU, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, will continue to identify good practices and promote parliamentary engagement with the information society at national and international level.

Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to present to you findings on the second important aspect of our work, namely how parliaments as institutions of public governance are using ICT to become more transparent, accessible and accountable to the public, as well as to make parliamentary processes more effective.

The *World e-Parliament Report 2008* is a joint publication of the IPU and the United Nations, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. It is the first assessment from a global perspective of how ICT is being employed by parliaments across the spectrum of activities for which they are responsible. It is based on the responses and comments provided by 105 assemblies from around the world to a survey on the use of ICT in parliament. It offers an authoritative baseline so that parliaments can conduct their own assessment on the use of ICT in their daily work, draw lessons from the different practices presented therein, and see how they can improve their processes.

The *Report* concludes that much more needs to be done to boost the use of modern communication technologies in parliament. There is a significant gap between what is possible with ICT and what has actually been accomplished by parliaments thus far.

- Approximately 10 per cent of the chambers and parliaments that replied to the survey have acquired extensive ICT capabilities across a wide range of key application areas. These include developing systems for managing essential documents, utilizing open document standards, creating rich websites that present information through a variety of formats and channels, and providing access to a wide range of online information linked to pending legislation.

- At the other end of the spectrum, as many as 30 per cent of parliaments lack a strategic plan, an adequate ICT infrastructure, basic tools for members and staff, systems for managing documents and trained ICT staff.

- The status of the ICT systems and services of those parliaments that fall between these two groups is uneven. Many of them have implemented ICT applications that serve some of their most important functions. But many of these applications appear to be operating at the lowest level of utility and have not been enhanced to take greater advantage of ICT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, or to offer additional services.

Mr. Chairman, when the Board of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament met in February 2008 in New York, it adopted a statement affirming that the use of ICT can significantly enhance and strengthen the mission of parliaments within each country, and empower people, in all their diversity, to be more engaged in public life. It called on all parliaments to make all possible efforts to ensure that, by 2020, authoritative, timely and complete information on all stages of the legislative process in every country is publicly accessible on the Internet. Only international cooperation, starting with enhanced cooperation between parliaments themselves, can realize this vision.

Thank you.