



Informing democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs

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Welcoming remarks

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The concept of the information society was discussed already in the 1950s and 1960s. The information society has, in academic literature, been seen as the successor to industrial society. An information society is a society in which the creation, distribution, diffusion, use and integration of information is a significant activity in every part of society, not least in the economic, political and cultural spheres. A closely related concept is that of the knowledge society. However, an even more related concept is democracy, as indicated by today's heading: "Informing Democracy". Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a democratic society without any information or knowledge. Information is one of the cornerstones of a democracy. This is why the theme of today's conference is so important for our national parliaments. The central position that a parliament enjoys – and should enjoy – in a society makes it natural to draw attention to how we can build capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs.

Over the past quarter century, there has been a growing demand from parliamentarians, both in developing countries and in developed countries, for more advanced information services. Naturally that includes expert analysis, synthesis of information and knowledge creation in a broader sense. A good organisation for information and knowledge is a key for the effectiveness and quality of legislation and decisions by parliament. In this regard, parliamentary research services and libraries have an important role.

The ASGP is one of the co-organisers of this one-day event. I think our discussions today will permit an exchange of perspectives on the challenges faced by parliaments and parliamentarians in obtaining the information and knowledge they require to function effectively. I hope this day can focus on the evolving needs of our parliamentarians and especially on differences in needs in different parts of the world. It is important to realize that we face different situations, developments and conditions in different countries. Hopefully this day will give us an opportunity to exchange experience and knowledge and to highlight some examples of good practices.

As President of the ASGP I have actively sought, through conferences and seminars such as this, to join parliamentarians, secretaries-general and officials from our various parliaments to discuss matters of common interest.

This is the third conference of its kind. The ASGP and the IPU have co-organised two successful conferences in 2006 and 2007. In 2006, the theme was parliamentary broadcasting with the European Broadcasting Union as the third co-organiser. In 2007, the theme was e-parliaments and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament was the third co-organiser. This kind of tripartite arrangement has proved very suc-

cessful in mobilising the various constituencies. The timing has the considerable advantage of facilitating the participation of parliamentarians and Secretaries-General who are already in Geneva for the IPU and ASGP events. I regard these conferences as a result of a deeper cooperation in recent years between the ASGP and the IPU. I hope this third conference is not the last, but that the tradition will be carried on in years to come, with conferences on topical issues of common interest.

With the support of the conference today, the ASGP and my fellow Secretaries-General show how important it is to bring together parliamentarians and officials responsible for library and research services. This offers us an opportunity to combine the various wishes and views that the people's elected representatives have about these issues with the competence and interest of our colleagues who work with these specific issues in parliament.

I greatly look forward to today's discussions and believe there are good prospects that these will be fruitful in relation to our common responsibility of building capacities in parliaments to meet the need for information and knowledge.