



Informing democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information needs  
Geneva, 16 October 2008

## **Closing speech**

**Gro Sandgrind**

Distinguished Members of Parliaments  
Secretaries General  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to say a few words at the end of this conference.

I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to co-sponsor this event together with the IPU and the ASGP.

In fact, as has been said earlier on today, this is the first time we have joined forces in organizing such a conference.

### **Libraries and democracy**

Organisations and institutions have libraries for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness, but in Parliaments this service can also ensure that members, their political staff and committees have an independent source of information support to aid them in holding the executive to account.

According to the IPU's good practice guidelines for Parliaments, a well resourced Parliament will have a comprehensive library information service.

And the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures recommend that "Members and staff of the Legislature shall have access to sufficient research, library and ICT facilities".

I will, however, argue that information expertise is vital to all parts of the political process. We all have a responsibility to ensure that democracy functions; not only the elected members of parliaments, but also all those working in libraries and research services in Parliaments.

A strong and independent parliamentary information service can make a difference by providing authoritative, independent and non-partisan background information and analysis to parliamentarians who work in a hectic environment.

This has been clearly demonstrated in the presentations given today.

I would also like to emphasize that feedback from you – our clients and users - is essential to maintaining and improving the services we offer.

We need a dialogue based on mutual respect in order to develop professional, sound and value-added services and products.

The survey, published in the World e-parliament report 2008, performed by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, provides an excellent framework for looking at needs and the innovative strategies to meet them.

### **IFLA Section**

Parliamentary libraries of the world form a Section of their own within IFLA.

The current membership brings together the leading professionals in parliaments from all over the world.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, there has been significant development in the work they do, not just in terms of quantity, but – in many legislatures – in terms of quality and depth. The digital age with its accompanying technological advances has changed the way work is done in both well-established and newly-established institutions.

### **Professional competency**

One of the Section's missions is to exchange experience, knowledge and problem solving, and promote networking. Another is to promote the establishment of libraries and research services as a fundamental component in the development of democratic legislatures throughout the world.

As a tool to help and guide those who are setting up such services, the Section's preparing a revision of the "Guidelines for legislative libraries", which we are planning to publish next year. The guidelines are written not only for the Library profession as a whole, but also for those involved in setting up new information services for legislators. This includes administrators and those who are responsible for authorising funds for this purpose.

We very much hope this will be of genuine help.

Training and development of staff is important. Parliaments are unique institutions and staff and management in legislative libraries need a specialized set of skills. The Section's mission is to support the development of the professional skills required within the parliamentary library and research services environment.

### **Networks with clients and with professionals**

In order to reach the objectives and goals we have been introduced to, we need to develop strong and effective partnerships with our parliamentary clients, institutions and organisations.

The library and research services section of IFLA would like to explore possible future projects or events together with other institutions or organisations

Today's event has been an excellent start.

I am please to inform you that next year in Rome, in conjunction with the Section's annual pre-conference, we have been invited to organize a one-day training session on ICT in parliamentary libraries together with the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. The object of this day is to address the needs of less experienced parliamentary libraries on new technologies.

There will be support for developing countries. The training session will be open to all countries.

To the Parliaments who are not now members of the IFLA parliamentary section, I would invite you to become part of this organisation.

Building networks between those working in the field of research and information services for parliamentarians, is an important mission for the Section. To benefit from each other's experiences and insights and to share best practice, is an integral part of developing sound legislative libraries.

Now that we have come to the end of this conference, I would like to express my warmest thanks to the organisers in the IPU, the ASGP and IFLA.

A special thank you goes to Bill Young and Joe Jackson from the Library of the Parliament of Canada and Andy Richardsson from the IPU. Without their assistance this conference would not have been possible to arrange.

Thank you!