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ADVANCE NOTICE

PARLIAMENTARY PANEL ON THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND PHASE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Tunis (Tunisia), 17 November 2005

Dear Madam President,
Dear Mr. President,

The second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. The WSIS - an event of major political importance - is unique among UN summits in its ambition to be a participatory multi-stakeholder process involving governments, international organisations, the private sector and non-governmental organisations. The first phase, held in Geneva in December 2003, was attended by more than 11 000 delegates from 175 countries. The second phase will focus on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment and Plan of Action that were adopted in Geneva, in order to build accessible, equitable and democratic knowledge-based societies.

During the Geneva phase, the IPU organized a parliamentary panel on the role and responsibility of parliaments in shaping an enabling normative environment for the Information Society. At its 176th session, the Governing Council of the IPU demonstrated its continuing interest and support for the WSIS process by endorsing the proposal to organize a parliamentary panel on the occasion of the second phase of the World Summit. The panel will be co-organised with the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies, in cooperation with UNESCO. It will take place on the **premises of the Tunisian parliament** on the afternoon of **Thursday, 17 November 2005**.

The theme of the panel will be the role of parliaments in building knowledge-based societies, with a particular focus on the question of access to information. This topical and important subject will be examined from two angles:

- Parliaments' ability to obtain the information they need to do their work effectively;
- Legislation guaranteeing citizens' right of access to information.

The objective of the panel will be to enable parliamentarians to obtain first-hand information on the issue of access to information as well as to exchange and compare their experiences. The meeting would also ensure that the voice of parliamentarians as legitimate representatives of the people is heard during the Summit, and lay foundations for parliamentary involvement in follow-up action at the national and international levels.

The best way to achieve this objective is to make sure that as many members of parliament as possible not only take part in the parliamentary panel on 17 November 2005 but also attend the proceedings of the World Summit in an official capacity as members of their country's delegation to WSIS. Among other things, this will allow them to have their travel, visa, accommodation and accreditation to WSIS taken care of in a centralized way by the competent governmental authorities and the host country's Executive Secretariat.

The IPU and Tunisian Chamber of Deputies are now finalizing the practical details of the parliamentary panel. You will be receiving the invitation letter, agenda, programme and other relevant information by mid-September at the latest.

The purpose of the present advance notice is to urge you to make good use of the coming five months leading up to the second phase of WSIS and to ensure that senior members of your Parliament who are active in issues relating to information are included in your national delegation to the WSIS and arrive in Tunis in time for the parliamentary panel.

It goes without saying that those members of your Parliament who will not be members of official delegations to WSIS but who will be present in Tunis at the time of the World Summit are also welcome to attend the parliamentary panel on 17 November 2005. I am currently carrying out consultations with the WSIS Secretariat and the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies concerning possible alternative arrangements for such parliamentarians so as to secure for them hotel accommodation in Tunis. Details of these arrangements will be spelled out in the invitation letter. However, it will be by far the best solution from both political and practical points of view for members of your Parliament to attend WSIS as part of your country's official delegation.

I thank you in advance for paying attention to this important matter, and remain,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders B. Johnsson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General