Resolution of the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) Conference on "e-Parliament, Concepts, Policies and Reality".

Conference held from the 12th until the 14th October, 2009 at the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Conference was attended by Chairpersons /Representatives of Committees responsible for ICTs and ICT Managers from:

Angola;
Lesotho;
Malawi;
Mauritius;
Mozambique;
Namibia;
Swaziland;
South Africa;
Tanzania;
Zambia;
Zimbabwe; and

Development Partners from:
UNDESA;
UNECA; and
OSISA.

Preamble

We, the representatives of the SADC Parliaments to the Regional ICT Conference "e-Parliament, concepts, policies and reality".

Noting the low level of connectivity in SADC beyond mobile phones and particularly in rural areas, which need to be addressed to ensure the vital participation and the economic inclusion of the citizenry in the information age and the input of citizens in the democratic processes;

Acknowledging the importance of a strong collaboration and of an improved exchange of information among Parliaments in the region to enhance the much needed regional integration and to encourage an open and equitable information society where citizens are able to share, receive and interact with their parliaments;

Acknowledging the Internet and ICTs as tools that create opportunities for economic, social and political regional integration;

Noting that for the SADC region to achieve political, social and economic integration there is need for a seamless communication backbone and a harmonised policy and legal environment;

Acknowledging the role ICTs can play in improving the access to and efficiency of Parliaments; that most challenges faced by parliaments are similar; and that there are big differences among SADC parliaments in terms of implementing ICTs tools, collaborative solutions should therefore be sought;

Acknowledging the need for ICT coordination at both national and regional level and the need to implement institutional structures that allow for coordination of cross-cutting ICT issues, in relation to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015;

Recognizing the need to develop e-parliaments in order to provide opportunities to develop standardized strategies aimed at directing technologies towards social and

economic development goals;

Recognizing the development of ICT policy and legislation and oversight functions that will ensure that the Internet is accessible, affordable and that the ICT tools and applications implemented in the Parliaments are relevant to the needs of the people of SADC;

Recognizing the great political returns of using open source software in Parliaments;

Noting the lack of a coordinated participation to Internet Governance Forum and other related issues;

Resolve to recommend to SADC PF issues of protocol, policies and standards are followed up and actioned through the Secretary General for SADC PF.

We recommend that:

The SADC Parliamentary Forum should:

1. Adopt a protocol on ICT for all SADC countries;
2. Initiate regional meetings in eight months, based on the recommendation of this resolution and with the support from developing partners, to review progress made;
3. Drive a regional two/three year ICT action plan, based on the regional and national needs in terms of ICT, providing clear priorities on issues pertaining to ICTs that should be adopted by Parliaments, with the provision to engage developing partners to support the implementation if required;
4. Ensure that ICT is put on the agenda of Parliaments by making it a thematic issue for discussions at the Plenary meeting in November 2009, especially so in view of the African Union 2010 Summit on ICT opportunities and challenges;
5. Initiate studies on ICT policy issues that could be shared between parliaments from different member countries;
6. Provide continuous training, capacity and operation

development for SADC PF, SADC Secretariat and SADC Parliaments and engage with parallel regional agencies;

7. Conduct fundamental policy reviews to assess the levels of implementation of the different protocols and policies;
8. Advocate for dedicated ICT (Communication) and Science and Technology committees in all member countries' Parliaments;
9. Advocate for ICT Master/Strategic Plan development in member countries' Parliament in a coordinated manner;
10. Make available policy briefs on relevant ICT policy issues such as open access, roaming, open standards, spectrum regulation and regional backbone and coordinate their activities with agencies responsible for the development of regional initiatives;
11. Set-up an Internet Governance Forum for SADC Parliaments to coordinate regional responses to the Internet Governance issues.

The Parliaments should:

a. on Policy, Legislation and Oversight:

12. Ensure that legislative and regulatory frameworks exist and are effectively implemented to address the ICT needs of our nations;
13. Review institutional mechanisms and structures to allow for effective coordination and integration of ICT across sectors;
14. Adopt, at national level, open and common standards and regulations in the following areas: broadband and roaming;
15. Engage in e-SADC formulation and implementation processes;
16. Build specialized capacity (skills and knowledge) for parliamentarians on ICT governance for engaging with national e-strategies, and to understand the capacity needs of institutions for which they have appointment and oversight functions;

17. Ensure that research and capacity building initiatives at national level are known to work with parliaments;
18. Ensure that national agencies are responsible for the collection of indicators;
19. Take action on the mobile phones calls and broadband costs and roaming charges, since these elements are direct related with Internet and ICT access.

b. On budget

20. Include ICT component in the budget allocation (both government and parliament side).

2. Parliament administration:

On adoption of open standards

21. Pioneer of XML Standards in Parliaments and pioneer of Open Source Parliamentary and Legislative Information Systems (e.g. Bungeni) as the pilot project in the SADC Parliaments;
22. Advocate for and migrate towards Open Source Software.

Motion to adopt the Resolution:
Proposed : Malawi;
Seconded: Zimbabwe.

Closure:

The Conference was declared closed the 13th October 2009 at 16.18pm, Good Hope Chamber, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.