International Conference

Parliaments' Information Management in Africa:

Challenges and Opportunities of ICTs

to Strengthen Democracy and Parliamentary Governance

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Camera dei Deputati, Italy

Mister Speaker,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will speak on behalf of Mr. Palanza, deputy secretary general of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, who apologizes for not being able to attend this Conference, due to a pressing commitment in the Italian Parliament.

First of all I wish to thank Speaker Kaparo and the Kenyan Parliament for their hospitality and keen support extended to the Conference. Let me also thank UNDESA staff and in particular Mr. Flavio Zeni for their excellent work in the organisation of the Conference.

In my presentation I will illustrate the contribution that the Italian delegation brought to Nairobi.

The Chamber of Deputies has been engaged since the beginning in supporting the UNDESA project “Strengthening Parliaments’ Information Systems in Africa”. In fact the project was funded by the Italian government under impulse of the Chamber, following the Conference of the Speakers of the African Parliaments organized in Rome in 2002 by Mr. Casini, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.

Within the UNDESA project, the Italian Chamber’s support then materialized with the organization of the Seminar held in Rome in January 28 last year, attended by the highest representatives of the eight Parliaments assisted by the UNDESA project.

During the Seminar in Rome the participants stressed the importance of the ICT for Parliaments, both in improving the quality of the legislature’s work and in strengthening the link between Parliament and citizens, by facilitating the access to its work. On the same occasion, many of you welcomed the opportunity of drawing on the experience and the lessons that more technologically advanced Parliaments have learned over the years. Finally, the seminar focused on the importance of inter-connectivity at this stage of ICT development and on the need of ensuring compatible standards and protocols both among different institutions of the same country and in the international context .

The Italian Chamber of deputies agreed to take on responsibility for developing these important indications in preparing the Nairobi Conference, organized by UNDESA under the high patronage of Speaker Casini.

A working group was set up under Mr. Palanza’s responsibility, as deputy secretary general, with the participation of many different departments and external experts and in full cooperation with the UNDESA

project. The working group proceeded for several months in an intense effort, aimed at producing a specific, original and valuable contribution to this Conference according to the objectives individuated by the participants in the Rome Seminar.

In the meantime, the UNDESA project had taken stock of the specific needs of the eight Parliaments – plus the Pan African Parliament – assisted by it, giving us the possibility of fine tuning our activity and work out a more effective approach.

The contribution that the Italian delegation brought to this Conference can be divided into two main areas: the ICT architecture for Parliaments and the role of Parliaments in leading the ICT development in their respective countries. Cross-cutting themes are the use of ICT for strengthening democracy and the need to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

As far as the first area is concerned – that is ICT architecture for Parliaments – we will continue and deepen the work undertaken last year in Rome. In the afternoon session Mr. Mario Panizza will give a presentation about how the Italian Chamber applies the ICT to its daily work. Drawing on that 30 year-long experience, the presentation will identify a few guidelines needed for building a sound Parliamentary information system, able not only to improve the functioning of the internal processes, but also to ensure citizens' access to the Parliament's work. Moreover, Mr. Panizza will describe the contents and operating procedures to feed input into the main data bases of the Parliamentary information system, needed to achieve great speed, accuracy, completeness, objectivity and transparency in making information available.

We can define the second area of our contribution as the “knowledge-based policy” in the field of ICT, starting from a survey of policies and strategies adopted in different countries. It revolves around the idea that the Parliament must play a key role as legislator in leading the development process of the ICT. We believe that it is necessary for this function to be rooted in a deep knowledge of policies and strategies that have been carried on elsewhere, and harvest the best results from worldwide experience.

We have therefore prepared an ICT International Compendium that represents a very original and new compilation. The Compendium is a database composed by a wide collection of documents, precisely 291, both from the European Union and from 9 individual countries (Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States of America). The laws, studies, circular letters collected in the Compendium have a broad scope and are aimed to facilitate, to steer or to “govern” the introduction of ICT in public administrations (e-Government section) and in society at large (Information Society section). The Chamber of Deputies team that compiled the Compendium reviewed documents from many sources, including the European Centre of Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), and the US and Canadian Parliaments. Other sources have been national government documents, national ICT development agencies websites and EU officials. This selection is completed by series of comparative studies made by research centres. The Compendium is now available on the websites of the Chamber (www.camera.it) and of the project (www.parliaments.info) and freely available to all Parliaments. A copy of the ICT International Compendium has been distributed to all participants of this Conference on CD-ROM.

Several presentations of the Italian team will develop the contents of the Compendium, as we believe that a good analysis represents the basis for any sound endeavour. One of our ICT engineers Mr. Carlo Simonelli is here to provide any information or explanation needed about this database.

Tomorrow morning, the presentation of professor Carlo Batini, from the University of Milan – one of the experts who participated to the Chamber Working Group – will provide a comprehensive view of policies and legal frameworks worldwide on the use of ICT in the fields of both e-government and information society, pointing out the best practices and lessons learned that can be of use to less technologically advanced countries.

Another expert, Ms Caterina Lupo spoke yesterday presenting the specific case study of Italy, and in particular of the project "Norme in rete", whose implementation has required the participation of several Italian institutions. The project is aimed at putting on line the entire current Italian legislation, contributing to transparency and shortening the distance between citizens and institutions.

Finally, yesterday's presentation by Mr. Enrico Seta responsible for ICT development in the Research Service of the Italian Chamber, has focused on strategies and regulations needed to use the ICT as an opportunity to strengthen development.

The common aim of all these presentations is to provide some useful instruments for managing the ICT development, showing also how this has been done elsewhere and presenting you with clearer ideas on the possible way forward.

We have brought you the tools, and I wish especially to draw the attention of the political leaders from many African countries who are here

today on this point: among those tools there is the true raw material for a high-level political initiative for ICT development, aimed to connect parliaments, governments, offices, universities and the entire society. Now it is up to you to use them in the best possible way, and applying them as appropriate to the unique situation of your country. Our administration is at your disposal for any request of further support and advice for technical and legislative aspects in the fields of our capacities.