ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT, AMBASSADOR GERTRUDE I. MONGELLA, MP, TO THE WORKSHOP ON PARLIAMENTS' INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA, NAIROBI, KENYA.

10 February, 2005

Excellencies,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am honored to have been called upon to participate in the opening ceremony of this important workshop on the challenges and opportunities posed by information and communication technology (ICTs) in strengthening democracy and Parliamentary governance in Africa. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) the organizer of this conference has set a platform for discussions on this important development theme. This conference is taking place at the moment when the world is preparing for the 2nd phase of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) scheduled to take place in Tunis, Tunisia in 2005.

The level of use, access and management of technologies particularly the ICTs contributes a great deal in making the difference between developed and developing economies. The African Continent remains marginalized because of its weak economy, declining share of the world trade resulting into poor and politically weak states.

2. In the fast growing competitive economy of the globalised world there is a need to fast track the development of Africa. The proposed African Union (AU) vision and mission and NEPAD Programme is an

attempt to integrate the peoples pf Africa, maintain peace, stability and security in order to develop the economies of the continent.

National, Regional and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) have a critical role to play as institutions charged with oversight, decision making and legislative responsibilities in this process

The information technology explosion offers exceptional opportunities to legislatures in Africa in their quest to provide efficient services to Members of Parliament and the people they represent in general. Parliaments, including the Pan-African Parliament, will efficiently and effectively be able to communicate and exchange information when they embrace Information Communication Technology (ICT).

The easy access to information through ICTs such as web search engines will provide Parliaments faster turnaround in publishing and communicating parliamentary records at less cost and within the shortest possible time. These are some of the exciting opportunities availed through ICTs and which will make parliaments real transparent, democratic and representative of the people.

3. Financing the acquisition of the necessary hardware and requisite software, including recruitment of expertise and the exposure of Members of Parliament to the world of ICTs becomes a must and not an option.

4. We need new vision and structures which should all translate into the creation of a conducive African environment that will facilitate the achievement of sustainable growth and development as well as prosperity for Africa and its peoples. The expectations are high and our peoples are tired of waiting. Our Parliaments, through efficient Service delivery, will play a pivotal role in the quest information dissemination to enable and governments to make informed decisions.

5. The Pan-African Parliament and the Legislative bodies of Africa, through ICTs, must become change agents. The many concerns of Africa can be better addressed through the use of efficient communication systems. For instance, shared political concerns over security and stability issues, exchanges on values and principles relating to democracy, governance and the rule of law, the process of economic integration, to name but a few are some of the potential areas that can be resolved through proper and efficient communication systems provided for by ICTs.

6. The procedures, traditions and the process of conducting Parliamentary business in Africa exhibit strong commonalities. These commonalities can be exploited for the betterment of existing and emerging Parliamentary systems in Africa making it possible to create an integrated common information management infrastructure that

can benefit the African Parliaments. The use of a common IT/IM system would allow greater sharing of experience, expertise and information between Parliaments and also improve the upgrading and sustainability of the systems.

7. I have no doubt that UNDESA in cooperation with respective parliaments will succeed in strengthening Parliaments' Information Systems in Africa by spearheading the design of sustainable Parliamentary Information Systems that enable better informed and more effective decision-making and provide easy and full access to all Parliamentary documentation by stakeholders. My earnest appeal to African Parliaments is to harness the ICTs in order to meet the expectations of the peoples of Africa. Linguistic, cultural, ideological diversity compels PAP to quickly revolutionalise the ICT to cope with the demand for globalised economy

We are building our parliamentary culture we have nothing to loose by embracing the ICT for effectiveness and efficiency

I thank you.