United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
New York

Welcome Remarks Made by Dr. John-Mary Kauzya, Chief of Governance and Public Administration Branch during the Opening of the International Conference on African Legal Resources: Challenges and Opportunities of Legislative Informatics Held in Abuja, Nigeria (21-22 March 2007)

- H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria represented by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General
- Senator Ken Nnamani, President of the Senate of the National Assembly of the Republic of Nigeria,
- Honorable Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan African Parliament represented by Ho. Suzanne Vos,
- The Charge d'Affaires of Italy representing the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Inter-Parliamentary Union,
- Mr. Nasiru Arab, Clerk to the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- Honorable Members of Parliament present,
- Distinguished Delegates,
- Colleagues from the United Nations system,
- Members of the press,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

I bring you greetings from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York. On behalf of UNDESA, I would like to thank your excellence for having found time in your heavy and critically important schedule to be with us here. Let me express our gratitude and appreciation to the National Assembly of Nigeria for having accepted to support this conference and for the warm welcome accorded to all the delegates to the conference. Your support demonstrates your commitment not only to the promotion of ICTs in legislatures in Africa, but also to building a united Africa. We believe that the application of ICT, which is the subject matter that has gathered all of us here, will assist

greatly in creating linkages in the edifice of an integrated Africa. I would also like to express a special thanks to our partner, the Pan African Parliament under the aegis of which this Conference takes place. For all of us this re-emphasizes the importance attached to Africa's integration. Your excellences, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to equally thank the "Global Center for ICT in Parliament" whose Executive Coordinator my colleague Gherado Casini is here with us for extending their support to the organization of the Conference. Before continuing with my remarks let me recognize the hard and tireless work that my colleague Flavio Zeni put in substantively organizing and facilitating the conference.

In Africa, DESA's focus on Parliaments as focal points for the promotion of good governance began with the pilot Project on "Strengthening Parliaments' Information Systems" that has lead to this conference. However, I must point out that this is part and parcel of the commitment and dedication of UNDESA to support good governance through the adoption of ICTs, which has been on-going for years as demonstrated through international initiatives such as the Global Forum on re-inventing Government, and Programs such as the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).

Last year at the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), UNDESA and the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) launched the "Global Center for ICT in Parliament" that can be considered as the offspring of the African experience of leveraging cooperation, collaboration and networks as cost-effective and useful means to build capacity and quality information services and tools.

It is now acknowledged that the adoption of ICTs provides a unique opportunity for Parliaments and other public institutions to improve their internal workflow processes and accessibility to information and services for their citizens. In this regard, ICTs offer great potential for promoting and supporting transparency through easy flow of information. Providing access to parliamentary and legislative documentation in a free, easy and powerful fashion as well as delivering always-updated law corpora constitutes a strong mechanism for strengthening democracy and justice which are strong tenets of good governance.

This brings into focus the key objective of the Conference which is to create an enabling environment to facilitate advanced online access to legislation and related parliamentary documents while promoting harmonization among different legislative codes at the national, regional and continental levels. Let me say that UN/DESA is proud of having initiated and remained a player in this process. The Conference should not be seen as the end point but as a very strategic milestone and a reference point for the work that lies ahead. There are opinions in certain circles to the effect that Africa is lagging behind in the application of ICTs in many socio-politico-economic fields. And these opinions are not unfounded. But this seemingly serious lagging behind could be turned into a huge advantage with Africa avoiding the obstacles that confronted those who pioneered the application of ICTs. With such an advantage Africa could easily take the lead in being innovative in this domain.

What will be discussed in this conference is a vision of a future where citizens will

have access to updated information about parliamentary activities and legislation not just of their own countries, but in the context of the African integration, of the whole continent and become an integral part of the Pan African process of harmonization and collaboration.

The technological foundations of this vision, which will be presented, are based on: **(i): AKOMA NTOSO** (That sounds beautifully African and I understand that it means "linked hearts" in the language of the Akan people of West Africa) is the open standard that will create a common virtual infrastructure for the parliamentary and legislative information of African institutions to make retrieval of information and collaboration much easier and effective and **(ii): BUNGENI** (Another beautifully African word, which means "inside parliament" in Kiswahili) a set of open source applications to manage effectively parliamentary and legislative documents and provide a platform for collaboration within parliaments, participations of citizens and accountability. All this will be illustrated in details during these two days. But feel free to enquire and have a hands-on experience at the "Africa i-Parliament Action Plan" booth outside in the foyer.

Let me add that we are very aware that the technological tools are only just one of the components. Tools need to be used and capacity needs to be built. We will also deal with this even more strategic issue during the conference and certainly Africa will have to maintain the momentum and make capacity building in this regard a continuous process. We need also to consider what will be required to set in motion an indigenous movement in Africa to root the skills and expertise in African institutions and academia.

Toward this end, UNDESA, in consultation with African Parliaments has finalized a new and wider framework (the "**Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan**") to support the modernization of African Parliaments. The Plan is an Africa-wide initiative whose main objective is to provide African Parliaments with the opportunity to modernize their information management capabilities and to become open, participatory, knowledge-based and learning organizations. The "Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan" extends and expands the scope of the current project and builds on its achievements by: (i)building human resource capacity in information and knowledge management at all levels of the parliamentary business; (ii)maximizing sustainability and economies of scale through a Pan-African approach; and (iii)leveraging the experience, tools and best practices to greatly shorten the learning curve of African Parliaments. It is a huge task that requires collaboration and partnership. UN/DESA has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) to work together on all these issues and we will continue to work in partnership to pursue the implementation of the MOU.

But, we need to realize that all this cannot be done and accomplished overnight. African National Parliaments need to appreciate that ICTs require a long-term investment in human resources and a more substantial and consistent allocation of financial resources. The opportunity is big and it is here. We all need to work hard to translate the potential into actual benefits for Africa's socio-politico-economic development. UNDESA is looking forward to have everyone concerned, executive branches of government, the judiciary, legislatures, civil society and private sector institutions, join in the work ahead and become

champions in meeting this challenging.

On this note allow me, to through you, thank the private sector institutions that have been associated with the support to this conference. They are: (i)HP for providing PCs for the Cyber center, (ii)Ubuntu Linux for the operating system and applications for the cyber center, (iii)Enhanced Media Systems Africa for the audio and video recording of the proceedings of the conference, and CELTEL Nigeria for support and hospitality. Their involvement in this conference emphasizes that there are mutual benefits when public, private, and civil society institutions collaborate.

Finally, your excellence, I would like to that you, the government and people of Nigeria for the hospitality we have continued to enjoy since our arrival in this country. May God Bless you. I would also like to thank the delegates for the time they have dedicated to the conference and for the efforts they have been putting into developing the application of ICTs in Parliaments in Africa.

I wish you all good deliberations.