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**Statement by Mr. Patrizio Civili
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR POLICY COORDINATION AND INTER-AGENCY AFFAIRS
TO THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ACTION LINE C1 SUBGROUP
ON ICT AND PARLIAMENTS
Geneva, 24 May 2007**

Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

on behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs I am very pleased to welcome you at this meeting of the Subgroup ICT and Parliaments that will address “Parliaments in the Information Age – mobilizing stakeholders around concrete initiatives”.

The meeting is part of Action Line C1 of the WSIS implementation process, which deals with The Role of Public Governance Authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of Information and Communication Technologies for Development.

I am particularly pleased to share the podium with my esteemed friend, Anders Johnsson, Secretary General of the Inter Parliamentary Union, the world Parliament organization which has agreed to share with DESA the challenge of facilitating this subgroup. Since the start of the preparatory process of WSIS, the Inter Parliamentary Union has been actively engaged in debating at global level the contribution of the Information Society to advance development and has been advocating a strong Parliament role in it.

We are sharing this podium not only because it is natural that the IPU should be associated in a discussion that centers on Parliaments and their role in the Information Age. It is a concrete manifestation of a joint initiative that DESA and the IPU have conceived, built and taken forward since late 2004 to provide a framework for action for stakeholders and partners around the world.

At the WSIS in Tunis, the Department and the Inter Parliamentary Union have launched the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament with the purpose of promoting a structured dialogue among legislatures both on the use of new technologies in parliamentary processes and on the role that parliaments and legislators can play for the advancement of the Information Society.

The Centre was established as a result of consultations undertaken with key Speakers and Presidents of legislative assemblies, who unanimously expressed consensus on the need to place the many fragmented initiatives in the broad field of ICT and Parliaments under one framework. These consultations took place also in response to the United Nations 2005 World Summit outcome calling “for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the Inter-Parliamentary Union (art. 171), and paved the way to the establishment of the high-level Board that now guides the work of the Global Centre.

The objectives and role of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament are therefore key ingredients of this meeting since its goals coincide with the purpose of this Subgroup, and we intend to rely on the Centre to further advance our common agenda.

Following the first consultation meeting of Action Line C1 in May 2006, and the subsequent establishment of the Sub-group on ICT and Parliaments, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament started to map partners, initiatives, documentation and collaborative efforts in two specific areas of work:

- (a) parliaments’ role in the promotion of the Information Society; and
- (b) applications of ICT tools for the modernization of parliamentary processes (e-parliament), including inter-parliamentary cooperation.

A comprehensive portal was established in October 2006 (www.ictparliament.org) and its content has progressively been enriched with the help of parliamentary institutions and partners worldwide. The portal now features ICT-related legislation, studies, analyses, best practices, videos and links to major activities around the world, organized by regional nodes.

DESA has also consulted with a large number of actors to help connect in a more coherent way the efforts of the international community to leverage the forces of the Information Society in support of democracy and development. Among these, in addition to the IPU and United Nations system entities, a number of national and regional parliaments, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Council of Europe, the International Parliamentarians Association for Information Technology (IPAIT), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) are currently discussing with the Global Centre concrete modalities of partnerships. To these international actors, an interested group of universities and research centres need to be added.

Let me now highlight some relevant activities that in recent months have helped all stakeholders strengthen their coordination potential in this domain.

Two specific activities have helped raise awareness of the role that parliaments can play in promoting the Information Society. They include the “IPAIT V” conference held in Finland in January 2007, and “The Policymaking role of Parliaments in the

Development of the Information Society” conference held in Italy in March 2007. Both allowed for frank discussions among members of parliaments and stakeholders, and resulted in final declarations.

Today, we will have the opportunity to reflect on both by listening to the presentations of the representatives of the Bulgarian Assembly – Honourable Spasov, and of the Chamber of Deputy of Italy – Mr. Seta.

With regard to the application of new technologies in parliamentary processes and in enhancing citizens’ participation, three major mechanisms of coordination must be highlighted. The first is the work carried out through the Africa i-Parliament Action Plan (www.parliaments.info), which promoted, among other initiatives, the international conference “African Legal Resources: Challenges and Opportunities of Legislative Informatics”, hosted by the National Assembly of Nigeria in Abuja in March 2007.

The second is the launch of the Global Network of IT experts in Parliament (GNIT), a virtual hub hosted by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament for sharing concrete experiences and practices among peers. The purpose of this Network is to coordinate implementation among stakeholders of new activities, IT solutions and information management practices.

The third is the work on eDemocracy carried out by the Council of Europe, which held a Symposium of experts on New Opportunities for Enhancing Civic Participation in Strasbourg in April 2007.

Still, much remains to be done with regard to coherence, harmonization of actions and common approaches in this important area of work, particularly by development partners and key players, including parliaments, in the area of technical assistance.

I hope that this meeting will shed some light on this critical effort and that, by dedicating its final session to it, this Subgroup can feel that a positive step has been added to our common path.

Thank you