

ASGP

Association of Secretaries
General of Parliaments

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Welcoming Address

World e-Parliament Conference

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Dear Friends,

Fifteen years ago, when I, as Director General of the Riksdag, received a report from a commission of inquiry on the computerisation of the Riksdag's parliamentary documents I couldn't, in my wildest dreams, predict the rapid development we've seen since then. It was quite extraordinary that we, in the early 1990s – before the breakthrough of the Internet and e-mail – were going to be able to computerise our parliamentary documents in full-text and make them searchable and available for a broader public! Efforts to make these parliamentary documents more accessible with the help of computer-based solutions had been launched some 15 years before that.

Developments have taken place at breakneck speed. But it's not only in the field of ICT that we've witnessed such changes. Internationalisation has taken giant steps forward during the same period. Today, for example, I have daily contact via e-mail with colleagues around the world in a completely different way than my predecessor in the post of Secretary-General.

Another example is the way in which ICT and internationalisation have meant that news can spread easily and rapidly across the world. In this age of globalisation we, as citizens are able to follow, participate in and influence events all over the globe. ICT is most certainly a tool that has come to have a massive influence in these globalised times. And computerisation goes hand in hand with internationalisation.

Our conference today illustrates both these tracks of development when representatives from many countries meet here in Geneva to discuss ICT and its future development.

The vision we had in the Riksdag and in several other parliaments some ten-twenty years ago, to make our official parliamentary documents and information available to the public has, in many senses, been realised. A key goal in these efforts has been to make the work and decisions of parliament transparent to the public, and thus to

create opportunities for greater understanding and dialogue on political developments. Freedom of expression and information have been crucial in this process.

The role of parliaments in a democracy is about this very thing. If we want to be part of a modern society we need to use all the available tools to open up our parliaments to the public. There is only one way for democracies to go about this, and that is to work for greater openness and transparency. This can be done in many ways. With these days in Geneva, with an international workshop yesterday for parliamentary staff and officials, today's conference with MPs, parliamentary staff, officials and Secretaries-General, and tomorrow's meeting of members of the **Global Network of IT Experts in Parliament**, we will all focus on various aspects of ICT. Two of these aspects are essential.

The first is the basic idea of using ICT to give the public free and full access to debates and other parliamentary activities. In working for this, we show our respect for the citizens' right to see for themselves what is going on inside parliament. This access is central to their opportunities to participate in a democratic political process. This puts us in a good position to improve the dialogue with citizens and enhance contacts between parliamentarians and the electorate.

The other aspect concerns the use of new technology to modernise parliamentary processes. During the initial stages of computerisation, identifying the ways in which ICT could be used in parliaments was, in many respects, the main task on the agenda. Using new technology to achieve a more efficient decision-making process and administration and to improve service to members preceded ideas about making the work of parliaments accessible to the public.

But both aspects of ICT are central. The four sessions today will focus on these two important aspects. Before lunch we have two sessions on how ICT can be used to modernise and make parliament's most important functions and tasks more efficient.

The two sessions this afternoon deal with **parliamentary information systems**. **How can we build high-quality and sustainable information services?** What lessons have been learnt in the use of parliamentary websites in the context of dialoguing with the electorate and civil society and enhancing interaction with citizens and the electorate?

At the same time, it is important to take into account the fact that developments have not come equally far all over the world. Everyone does not have the same resources and opportunities for accessing new technology. Views on the rights of citizens to political influence and freedom of expression and to accessing information also vary between different political cultures. The conference we are holding today therefore constitutes an important forum for exchanging and sharing experiences with one another. It gives us an opportunity to debate the challenges and benefits provided by ICT. It can also serve to analyse successful approaches, and identify good practices and lessons learned.

I consider it particularly valuable that we can meet here in Geneva at a conference that unites parliamentarians, Secretaries-General and parliamentary staff and officials

who work with ICT, such as legislative staff, IT administrators, knowledge managers and librarians. For the ASGP and my fellow Secretaries-General, it is important to be able to bring together parliamentarians and officials who work with ICT. This offers us an opportunity to combine the various wishes and views that the people's elected representatives have about these issues with the competence and interest among our colleagues who work with these specific issues in parliament.

We Secretaries-General have a specific commitment in our respective parliaments to make efforts to open for dialogue between our members and officials who work with ICT. At the Riksdag, ever since we started the computerisation process, members have shown a considerable interest in getting involved in the issue of ICT development. This has taken place in various forms of expert and reference groups, where it has been possible to convey the members' views and wishes directly to the relevant officials working with ICT development. I believe that this has been the basis for the success we have had at home in these matters. As recently as a couple of weeks ago, I initiated a strategy seminar on ICT and the Riksdag which will take place in the near future with parliamentarians from each of the parties in parliament. One of the appointed members is present here today. We as officials want to know more about the parliamentarians expectations in the field.

Finally, as a representative of the ASGP I want to express our satisfaction with the cooperation with the IPU and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliaments.

We have every reason to look forward to valuable and interesting discussions here today.