Background

The theme of information and communication technologies in parliament has received growing international attention, including among Speakers and Presiding Officers, legislators, parliamentary staff and experts.

Over the last four years the annual World e-Parliament Conference has emerged as the most recognized and respected forum of the community of parliaments for addressing both the policy and technical issues involving the use of ICT in the legislative setting. At these gatherings, delegations repeatedly highlighted the value of inter-parliamentary cooperation and collaboration through networks and associations as one of the least expensive and potentially most effective ways for parliaments to develop e-parliament policies and enhance their use of technology. Emphasis was also placed on cooperation at the regional level, which can offer unique opportunities to share resources, overcome lack of know-how and establish common approaches.

Frequent consultations, sharing of experiences, targeted knowledge transfers and the exchange of lessons learned at the administrative level were identified as extremely important mechanisms to strengthen the capacity needed to perform a variety of critical tasks within the parliamentary administrations at the service of the membership and the citizenry.

Collaboration among parliamentary libraries is one of the areas for most effective networking as evidenced by the exchanges occurring through the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for parliaments, the ECPRD Working Group on Parliamentary Libraries, Research and Archives and the APKN Working Group on Parliamentary Libraries.

Parliaments have always been information intensive institutions. E-parliament has created even greater demand for information and has raised the bar by requiring that information be more current, more complete, and more tailored to the individual needs of members and committees. Parliamentary libraries contribute to the parliamentary business by providing members with authoritative, independent, non-partisan and relevant information. As
libraries and research services have evolved greatly in the last decades due to the emergence of new technologies, they have increasingly turned their focus to the role that ICT can play in strengthening parliamentary information and explored key cross-cutting topics falling in between the traditional library challenges and the IT environments, such as websites (Internet and intranet) and digital reference/information services; digitization processes and preservation; social networking tools and collaborative work; improved efficiency of library services through ICT; and, deployment of open source software.

However, only a few libraries have been able to respond effectively and creatively to the increasing demands of parliaments by integrating technology into their work in new and innovative ways.

While findings from the 2007 and 2009 surveys undertaken by the Global Centre indicate that many libraries have been able to adopt new technologies to support their traditional tasks of acquiring, organizing, and managing information resources, many still face problems such as lack of connectivity to the parliament’s intranet and the absence of preservation plans for digital resources.

The World e-Parliament Report 2010 suggests that most parliamentary libraries have basic ICT-supported capabilities such as systems for managing library resources. However, over 40% are not connected to a parliamentary intranet, even though LANs are in place in nearly all legislatures. This severely limits the nature and extent of e-services that libraries can provide, such as online access to information sources that are organized according to the policy issues that the parliament is addressing. Nevertheless, 50% of libraries are able to offer this type of service and over 50% subscribe to online journals and databases.

Libraries contribute to e-parliament in a number of other ways. Many are taking an active role in maintaining an archive of parliamentary documents in digital formats. Over 50% do this already and an additional 30% are planning or considering doing it. These archives include some of the most important parliamentary documents, such as bills, plenary documents, committee documents, and research reports. Libraries also contribute to the website of the parliament, most often by providing some of its content. A significant number are also engaged in updating and maintaining the website, and some are involved in the organization, testing, and design of the site. Two thirds of parliamentary libraries serve the public and a majority of these allow public access to the library’s website.

Only 45% of libraries participate in formal online networks for sharing information with other libraries and research services. This is less than the 59% of parliaments that participate in formal networks for the exchange of information and experiences regarding ICT.

Libraries in parliaments in low income countries continue to face significant challenges. Compared to those in high income countries, far fewer have systems to manage traditional library resources, are connected to the parliament’s intranet, and participate in networks for the exchange of information, ideas, and best practices.
Workshop goals and objectives

The Workshop Leveraging ICT to promote networking, knowledge sharing and cooperative actions among Latin American Parliamentary Libraries intends to respond to some of these challenges by providing a platform for senior parliamentary staff from Latin American legislatures to exchange views and experiences on the effective use of information and communication technologies in parliamentary libraries.

In particular, the meeting aims at identifying those technologies and tools that can improve the delivery of information services to users – i.e. members, staff and citizens – as well as good practices in the area of IT support to libraries.

At the same time, the Workshop will look at the role of technology as enabler for cooperation among parliamentary libraries at the regional and international level with a view to identify a possible roadmap for future inter-parliamentary cooperation in this field.

Targeted Audience

The workshop is aimed at Directors of Libraries and Directors of IT Departments of Latin American parliaments. Through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the co-organizers will be able to sponsor the participation of the Director of the parliamentary library of each Latin American assembly/chamber (if organized according to the bicameral settings, the Director of the Library of each chamber) and the participation of the Director of the IT Department of each Latin American assembly (if organized according to bicameral settings, the Director of the IT Department of each chamber).

In addition, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the co-organizers will support the participation of a limited number of experts in representation of parliamentary networks and other parliamentary libraries or IT departments which will share their knowledge and expertise during the workshop sessions.

Meeting venue and format

The Workshop will take place over three full days at the National Congress of Chile in Valparaiso. The first day will be dedicated to experiences on regional and international parliamentary networks in relation to the situation of parliamentary libraries in Latin America. The second day will address issues concerning the use of ICT for improving parliamentary services and citizens’ services. The third day will focus on IT support and innovation, as well as on future collaboration among Latin American parliamentary libraries.

During the workshop, participants will also have the opportunity to learn about the latest innovation in the Library of the Congress of Chile and the technology options adopted by the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies to support the day-to-day work of the legislature.

Languages

The workshop languages will be Spanish, Portuguese and English.

Organizers

The Workshop is co-organized by the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Congress of Chile, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. It will receive the substantive support of the membership of the IFLA Section on Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services.