

**A. R. E.
PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY**



THE PRESIDENT

**Speech
Of Dr. Ahmed Fathi Sorour
President of the People's Assembly
of Egypt**

**on
World e-Parliament Conference 2008**

**25 - 26 November 2008
European Parliament
Brussels**

**Dear Distinguished Speakers and Members of
Parliaments Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a true pleasure for me to be here today to inaugurate with you the works of the World e-parliament Conference that is increasingly becoming a vital gathering on the international parliamentary arena. Looking around me, I feel indeed pleased to see this diverse group of participants from all over the globe focusing on one major objective which is how to further support our parliamentary and legislative mission and work together hand in hand to strengthen our democracy.

Dear participants....

The impact of technology in our contemporary life is so profound and known to everyone. Yet, the question is...to which extent is such technology employed in our parliamentary life and what is the tangible outcome? It was only few years ago when I was honored to be one of two founders of the Global Center for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliaments hosted in Rome which I currently co-chair with the Mrs. Lady Speaker of the Parliament of ffungry....A center that dedicates itself to work with parliaments, intentional and regional organizations and a spectrum of stakeholders to utilize, rationalize and promote ICT in parliaments and their constituencies. It was a hope that technology that surrounds us and knocks our doors lends

itself for the service of parliamentarians and their peoples. This can and should take place on four interrelated fronts:

- * First, how to enhance the communication between parliamentarians themselves within the same chamber and across the aisle from one another. We all experience that sometimes the virtual distance between colleagues within the same parliament, whether representatives or supporting staff, becomes unnecessarily large. How often in the past did we look for information relevant to our work that were not readily available unless after exhausting search. Moreover, we all know how much does political stand coordination and voting of individuals and their corresponding parties are of crucial importance. And here, once again, is technology stemming to facilitate this matter.**
- * Secondly, ICT is there to extend bridges between the parliamentarians and their constituencies. In an era where the volume of information is exponentially climbing and time is getting scarcer, parliamentarians have an urging need to remain in contact with their people, to feel their pulses, to cast their views, to sense their worries and to help aspiring for a better tomorrow.**
- * Thirdly, ICT, as evidenced by this beautiful gathering today offers a new dimension to help supporting indispensable communication between parliaments in our world that is often referred to as a small village. You know as well as I do that legislations are never in isolation across the world even when**

taking cultural, ethnic and socio-economic dimensions into considerations. How can parliaments benefit from the accumulated experiences of other parliaments in a timely and effective manner.....How can we prepare, coordinate and monitor international and regional laws and agreements without a sound base of information and an effective means of communications. Look at the current international financial crisis and how strong networking among parliaments could, when functional and effective, have been greatly helpful in findings common solutions and forming a unified stand.

* Fourth, comes documentation and the associated infrastructure that manages and updates its operation. As all of you know...we never address an issue in our parliaments unless we have conducted a thorough research and looked at a number of relevant documents. When I think of the documents that I personally go through each parliamentary year, I do not exaggerate if I say they are in the order of thousands. Archiving and proper data storage, sorting and handling is a key success element in a parliament performing in the 21st. century. With that I must add, the analysis of data and the monitoring of trends are of top importance towards a sound decision making and sincere voting systems.

Dear Friends...

As I go through the advantages and merits of technology rest assured that we remain aware of the concerns and challenges. At first, there is a digital gap and divide between the developed and the developing countries and while ICT assists in narrowing that gap, the difference is clear between the level and extent of employment of technology in a developed country as opposed to a developing one. That is another reason, why we are here today... simply to exchange views and stretch arms to support one another. Our world that is still facing monsters of ignorance, poverty and wars is a world that needs to take closer steps through the work of parliamentarians. Again, there exists the challenge of misuse of technology, pirating and other unethical forms for use and attributions. And that should never be practiced or allowed in our parliaments as our people look high upon us. Last but not least, there are technical and know-how obstacles that face developing countries in introducing technology in their parliaments. Such obstacles need to be abolished or at least minimized through a rational use of resources, support of the international community and healthy exchange of experiences. Having said so, I am pleased to share with you an emerging story of success that is yet to be accomplished. The representatives of 34 African parliaments and assemblies with the support of the UN, the IPU, the Global Center, have gathered in Cairo, Egypt last June to establish the African Knowledge-Based Network. The charter of this network is naturally one that aims at fostering the cooperation amongst the parliaments in our continent and enhances their

visibility and cooperation with similar international networks and assemblies. I am pleased also to announce that the Egyptian parliament has been chosen to host the first secretariat for that promising and uprising network.

Dear Participants

I want to draw your attention that this conference comes after the launching of the World e-Parliament Report last February in New York, the first report of its kind. A report that demonstrates the cooperation of the UN, the global center, the IPU, civil society as well as more than 105 assemblies and parliaments. I do invite you to read the report and analyze its outcome and commit ourselves to improve, update and most importantly disseminate it and share it with our communities.

Fellow Parliamentarians, dear guests...in the two days duration of this conference, there exists many vital issues to be discussed. A prime one is how to strengthen the democratic institutions in the information society..... A society that is characterized by being dynamic, ever-evolving and resource-demanding. What kind of a structure, schemes, mechanisms and human resources will be able to accept the challenge and undertake the tasks? Another key issue is how to meet the needs of parliaments, in particular within developing countries, using ICT as the means not the end and capitalizing on technology as the tool not the objective in itself. With all of that at hand, our conference will discuss opportunities

rendered by ICT. And when I say opportunities, I mean creating them and fully utilizing them for the common welfare and not waiting for them to occur.

Ladies and Gentlemen....

An appreciated effort has been exerted in preparing for this remarkable event that is hosted by the European Parliament. Let us make the best use of these opportunities, let us open our minds and our hearts towards a fruitful cooperation and exchange of knowledge. And remember that fostering democracy is a journey never a destination.

I wish you and this conference all the success.