Sixth General Assembly of the International Parliamentarians' Association for Information Technology
IPAIT VI

Sofia, 9 – 10 June 2008

Joint Communiqué

The parliamentary members of the International Parliamentarians' Association for Information Technology (IPAIT), who gathered for the Sixth International Assembly of the organisation in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 9-10 June 2008, issued the following communication:

1. The Sixth General Assembly of IPAIT was attended by 110 delegates from 24 states, as well as by diplomats and representatives of other national and international bodies. Three countries which are not member states took part in the discussions.
At the General Meeting of the General Assembly, the participating parliamentarians discussed the topic of "Information Technology and Ethics".

2. The topics of the previous IPAIT General Assemblies were: "The Digital Divide" (IPAIT I, Seoul, Republic of Korea, July 2002), "Enhancement of Digital Opportunities through e-Parliament and ICT Development" (IPAIT II, Bangkok, Thailand, May 2004), "IT for Social Integration" (IPAIT III, City of Brasilia, Brazil, July 2005), "IT for Everybody" (IPAIT IV, Rabat, Morocco, June 2006), and "Human Competency Development in the Information Society" (IPAIT V, Helsinki, Finland, January 2007).

3. The General Assembly meeting was opened on June 9th 2008 at the Plenary Hall of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria by the Vice-Speaker of Parliament, Prof. Lyuben Kornezov, followed by an opening address by the President of IPAIT, Jyrki Kasvi of Finland, the host country for IPAIT V. The opening ceremony proceeded with speeches by the President of the Bulgarian State Agency for Information Technology and Communications, Mr Plamen Vachkov, and by the Member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Dr Hyo Seuk Kim, one of the founders of IPAIT. The Keynote Address was delivered by Academician Prof. Kiril Boyanov, Doctor of Technical Science. His speech was entitled "The ICT, Democracy, Internet Threats and Ethics." Academician Boyanov stressed the importance of information technology in modern society. He said that hardware and software affect the economy, politics, security and civil society development, creating integral communication systems. Technological advances make life easier, but also pose a number of risks to users, the speaker also noted. Among the risks he singled out unauthorised invasions of privacy, attacks against financial and government institutions, new approaches to the coordination of terrorist operations, impeding the work of law-enforcement authorities on an international scale. The advantages of online communication were summed up by Academician Boyanov as opportunities for global communication in all spheres of public and social life, dissemination of the cultural achievements of every nation, access to education, opportunities to improve one's competitiveness and the free

movement of goods. The renowned scientist noted the failures of Internet technical support, such as the proliferation of computer viruses, spamming and phishing fraud. In conclusion, he said that legislative regulation of Internet communication would be the greatest threat to the global network. Academician Boyanov declared himself in favour of the development of a Code of Ethics for the use of cyberspace, which would require political will and the joint efforts of experts in the areas of high technologies, psychology, sociology and ethics.

4. The Member of the Bulgarian Parliament, Mr Mincho Spasov, was elected President of the General Assembly, and the Member of the Indian Parliament, S.S. Ahluwalia, was elected Vice President.

5. During the plenary sessions, 14 country reports were presented, highlighting the current development of Information Society from the perspective of the organisation, by Dr Hyo Seuk Kim from the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Mincho Spasov from the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Jyrki Kasvi of Finland, Senator Virgil Serbu from the Senate of Romania, Mr S.S. AHLUWALIA of the Rajya Sabha, India, Shri K.V. Thangkabalu, member of parliament of India, Sang Jin Shin, member of parliament of National Assembly of Republic of Korea, Dr. Askin Asan, member of parliament, Turkey, Madame Verginia Vedinas, Senatrice, Roumanie, Thomas M. Buchsbaum, Council of Europe, Mr Plamen Vachkov, Bulgaria, Prof. Kiril Boyanov, Bulgaria.

6. The sessions were organised in three panel discussions: "Information Technology and Parliamentary Ethics", "Transparency Versus National Security: Finding the Right Balance", and "Ethical Problems of the Information Society, Response of the Legislator and their Settlement according to the Legislation."

7. Representatives from 11.countries took part in the first panel discussion, entitled "Information Technology and Parliamentary Ethics". During the debate, the participants shared their experience in construction of home-pages of the national parliaments.They addressed ethical issues relate to the information posted on those sites, including the extent to which it is admissible that information on public personalities should contain any personal data endangering the security of the person concerned; how far the exhaustive information on the members of parliament affects electoral dispositions, and how to optimise the ways of keeping the public informed of parliamentarians' actions through high technology. Another aspect of the discussions concerned the methods of voting in the various parliaments, the admissibility of introduction of electronic voting in them and how it affects democratic processes. Opinions were expressed that the deprivation of the right to electronic voting impedes the member of parliament's right to vote at all in exceptional circumstances. On the other hand, it was argued that electronic voting is contrary to the imperatives of democracy, *viz*. that a member of parliament should always vote in person rather than through the medium of on-line voting.

8. Representatives from 9 countries took part in the second panel discussion, entitled "Transparency Versus National Security: Finding the Right Balance". The moderator, Mr

Mincho Spasov from the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, said that Internet communities could be partners to government institutions in the fight against terrorism. Addressing the delegates, he stressed that counter-terrorism requires legislative as well as practical measures. They would help the law enforcement authorities enlist a more active public commitment to the new security challenges posed by globalisation, Mincho Spasov stressed. "The legislative measures must be applied parallel to the efforts to win public confidence in the fight against terrorism," he added. There is a credible risk of restrictive measures on the Internet evoking a negative reaction from users unless they are sufficiently grounded and popularised, Mincho Spasov also said in his speech.

It was argued during the discussions that crisis management is needed in case of threats of cyber-terrorism. The participants reiterated their readiness to facilitate the use of high technology wholly and solely to the benefit of civil society and democratic processes.

9. Representatives of 9 countries took part in the third panel discussion entitled "Ethical Problems of the Information Society, Response of the Legislator and their Settlement according to the Legislation." During the debate views were expressed that closer interaction is needed between civil society, the media and politicians for optimum use of the advantages of information technology in its parliamentary dimension. e-Parliament and e-Government must become an organic part of democratic processes without having to be designated as innovation, participants in the discussions noted.

10. The Sixth General Assembly meeting of IPAIT reviewed the state of information-technology-oriented co-operation among the parliamentarians of the Member States and concluded that further efforts are needed to facilitate networking and communication, particularly among the participants in General Assembly meetings.

11. The Sixth General Assembly meeting of IPAIT unambiguously approved the membership of Indonesia in the organisation.

12. The Sixth General Assembly meeting of IPAIT approved the Sofia Declaration, which expresses a shared consensus concerning the introduction of international regulation and standards of ethics for the dissemination of information, recommends co-ordinated legislative definition of Malware threats spread in the Internet, and declares itself it favour of legislative measures for Internet use by children, protection of children in the Internet, and use of scientific research to mitigate the harmful effects of online communication on large groups of people.

13. The delegates discussed the continuity related to the participation of Member States in IPAIT.

14. The Sixth General Assembly meeting of IPAIT held a Special Joint Session with the Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South Eastern Europe, which is hosted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria. The theme of the session

was: "e-Parliament in Support of Parliamentary Responsibilities: Representation, Supervision and Legislation". The Joint Session was organised in response to the Decision from Helsinki to start co-operation with the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, established on the initiative of the UN. Taking part in the discussions were Mr Gherardo Casini, Executive Co-ordinator of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, Mr Jeffrey Griffith, Senior Adviser at the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, Mr Vladimir Danchev, Head of the Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Co-operation in South Eastern Europe.

15. On June 10, 2008, the Speaker of Bulgarian parliament Georgi Pirinski welcomed the participants. He praised the issues discussed especially the one regarding the unequal Internet access of different social groups. He stressed the importance of the Final Declaration, adopted by the assembly, which recognizes the need for regulatory intervention based on common ethical standards concerning the use of information technologies but also puts a limit of too much interference on the part of governments. On the focus of discussions was the protection of children from the harmful impacts in Cyberspace. National assembly chairman added that the discussion was very important and well timed.

15. The General Assembly meeting also took notice of the invitation presented by the Indian delegation for the Seventh General Assembly of IPAIT, which will take place in India.

17. The participants in the Sixth General Assembly meeting of IPAIT expressed their appreciation and congratulated Bulgaria on the organisation of the forum.

18. The participating parliamentarians congratulated India, which will be the host country of the Seventh General Assembly of IPAIT in 2009, and expressed their satisfaction with the successful and fruitful discussions and decisions in Sofia. The theme of the Seventh General Assembly of IPAIT next year will be: "Privacy, accuracy, property, accessibility and ICT"