

**REPORT OF THE INAUGURAL GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
PARLIAMENTARIANS ASSOCIATION FOR
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IPAIT)**

**HELD ON JULY 23 – 26, 2002 AT THE SHILLA HOTEL
SEOUL, REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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NAIROBI*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The world is changing from an industrial society to a knowledge society. New innovations, such as personal computing, mobile telephony, internet and interactive digital television have transformed and are transforming the world economy, the structure of society and ways of living.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is propelling growth, not only for the economy, but also for many other sectors such as education, health, environment, etc., thereby contributing to the enhancement of the overall welfare of mankind.

However, there is a wide disparity between geographical regions and even within regions in terms of access and the ability to use ICTs, which is often termed as the *Digital Divide*. In order to make ICTs relevant and beneficial to the people, the digital divide has to be bridged or eliminated.

2.0 INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS' ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IPAIT)

The International Parliamentarians' Association for Information Technology (IPAIT) is an inter-parliamentary group whose main objective is to foster discussions and cooperation among parliaments worldwide to promote Information Technology (IT) and to narrow the digital divide among countries.

IPAIT was officially inaugurated on July 23, 2002 at the Shilla Hotel in Seoul, Republic of Korea.

3.0 PARTICIPATION

The inaugural General Assembly of the IPAIT took place at the Shilla Hotel in Seoul, South Korea from July 23 – 26, 2002, with the participation of 82 parliamentarians from 33 countries. Four countries participated as observers.

Participating countries included: Albania, Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lithuania, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Netherlands, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Spain, Thailand, Turkey and Venezuela. Chile, Switzerland, New Zealand and United States of America participated as observers.

4.0 OPENING CEREMONY

The inaugural General Assembly of IPAIT took place on July 23, 2002.

At the opening ceremony, Hon. Huh Unna, Chairwoman of the Preparatory Committee gave the opening remarks. Hon. Cho Boo Young, Vice-Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea gave the welcoming remarks in place of His Excellency Park Kwan Yong, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea.

Chairwoman Huh Unna explained in her remarks the progress of the establishment of the association and stated that the key objective of the IPAIT is the promotion of a dialogue and cooperation among parliaments and parliamentarians for the advancement of information technology. The Chairwoman also stated that given how the digital divide is widening gaps in various fields including the economy, education, welfare and environmental, the urgent need to address the digital divide became the main theme of the Inaugural Assembly. Furthermore, she expressed her anticipation for ways facilitating dialogue and cooperation to be sought through the results of the conference.

Speaker Park Kwan Yong stated in his remarks that while advancement of information technology contributed towards expanding the welfare of mankind by stimulating economic growth and bringing convenience to our lives, it also widened social and economic gaps between countries and classes. The Speaker also noted other negative aspects of IT such as the invasion of privacy and other similar social problems from unscreened dissemination of harmful online information. He recalled that one of the aims of the IPAAT is searching ways to minimize these side effects. He believed that the Conference would provide the venue for sharing ideas and solutions for the era of information technology.

5.0 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

5.1 First Session:

In the first session, the Charter of the Association was adopted. Hon. Huh Unna, Chairwoman of the Preparatory Committee was elected the President of the Association. Joint Communiqué Drafting Committee, comprising of one Member of Parliament from all participating countries was formed and moderators for the country report and panel discussions were designated. It was agreed that the next IPAAT conference would be held in Bangkok, Thailand in July, 2003.

5.2 Second And Third Sessions:

During the second and third Sessions, delegations gave reports on the advancements of Information Technology (IT) in their respective countries. The Assembly served as a meaningful forum to share experiences of IT-related advances in both advanced and developing countries, where each of the models presented could serve as useful information for another country's development of IT strategy.

5.3 Commemorative Presentations and Reception:

During the commemorative presentations and reception, a video presentation by Bill Gates under the title of "*Digital Decade for Everyone*" was shown. Vice-President of e-Biz group of Korea Telecom gave his remarks on "*Changes in IT Trends and their and Effects*" and President Hans Peter Klaey of SAP Asia 10, delivered his speech on "*Turning Digital Divide into Digital Dividends*".

5.4 Fourth Session:

It the fourth session, Hon. Lee Sang Chul, Minister of Information and Communication of the Republic of Korea; Mr. Kim Hong Ki, President of Samsung SDS, and Mr. Ko Won Yong, President of HIST, gave talks on “e-Government & Social Divide”, “e-Biz & Economic Divide”, and e-Learning & Educational Divide” respectively, followed by panel discussions.

Summaries of the three topics are as follows: -

A. e-Government & Social Divide

e-government is the use of Information Technology in public sector to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability towards good governance.

Under e-government plan, various data in the government is digitalized and an on-line public service started. Government procedures such as custom clearance, public clearance, etc. are reduced in time from several days to only hours.

This results in efficiency and transparency of the government system as red tape is reduced toward one-stop service, rapid response, rural coverage and round-the-clock 24 x 7 service. This enables all people to receive various public services through the Internet.

B. e-Business & Economic Divide

e-business entails the use of the Internet to promote local products. It promotes the buy-and-sell procedure by providing on-line and real time e-Transaction catalogs, inventories and payments, etc.

e-Business bridges up the Economic Divide gap between people in rural and urban areas by giving them equal economic opportunity in the electronic world. This results in increased productivity and innovation in most fields.

C. e-Education & Education Divide

e-Education is the use of advanced information infrastructure (Broad Band Network Technology) to set up an e-Learning platform to support on-line education for students in poor and remote areas.

e-Learning enables students in poor and remote areas to have equal education opportunities with those in cities. E-learning bridges the education divide by promoting education in poor and remote areas as it enables those students to learn how to use computers and the Internet. Students can browse educational and information websites and teachers can assign teach and assign research topics on the web.

6.0 JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The Inaugural Assembly agreed on the following: -

- a. The Information Technology revolution is the biggest revolution that the history of mankind has yet experienced. By making knowledge and information key factors for national production in today's information society, information technology is changing the overall landscape of society.
- b. Information Technology is propelling growth not only for the economy but also for many other areas such as education, health and environment, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the overall welfare of mankind.

- c. Human capital boosts economic growth and the introduction of information technology on less developed and developing countries plays a decisive role in accumulating human capital.
- d. Digital divide does, in fact, exist in this globalize market and cause less developed and developing countries to lose their competitiveness. This, in turn, deepens the poor-get-poorer and the rich-get-richer phenomenon.
- e. Unless immediate measures for digital divide are implemented, the gap will only widen further.
- f. Information advancements and poverty eradication in less developed and developing countries are directly linked to the continuous growth of the world economy. With regards to the digital divide, IT-strong nations must exert active efforts to eliminate it.
- g. Due to constraints in finance, human capital and technological capabilities, less developed and developing countries have difficulty introducing information technologies in their countries. Therefore advanced countries, the World Bank, the UNDP and other IT-related international organizations must discuss, in earnest, the agenda on the elimination of digital divide.
- h. No one should be excluded from the benefits of information society. Less developed and developing countries much be guaranteed participation in setting up international policies regarding informatization such as developing digital contents and internet domains.
- i. For a few developing countries, the government's leading role of implementing policies crucial in the development of information technology. Private companies and civil societies are also critical players of IT advancement.

- j. Growth of IT encompasses all are including society, economy and law. In this regard, the Parliament of each country, as the leader of policy making in the digitalization process, must full exercise its rights to allocate budget and reduce tax.
- k. The Inaugural Assembly will distribute this Joint Communiqué to governments, IT-related international organizations and IT multinational companies to make certain that they recognize the importance of narrowing the digital divide.

7.0 RESOLUTIONS

The Inaugural Assembly resolved to:

- a. Reaffirm its commitment to take on a central role in overcoming the issue of digital divide both at the international level between advanced and less developed countries and at the national level between regions and classes.
- b. Urge countries to adopt an action plan for eliminating the information gap between countries at the World Summit on Information Society to be held in Geneva between October 10th and 12th next year and in Tunisia in the year 2005.
- c. Call on the UN General Assembly to hold a discussion on digital divide and adopt a resolution thereof.
- d. Urge the Secretary General of the UN to take steps so that other UN organizations may exert greater efforts to relieve the divide.

- e. Urge the UN to establish a task force to devise and provide guidelines for bridging the information gap.
- f. Urge the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to set up a special fund for less developed and developing countries to build basic infrastructures for information technology.
- g. Urge it-strong countries to devise special plans to help less developed countries accumulate human capital and receive technological support.
- h. Call on major multinational IT companies to take necessary measures in order for less developed and developing countries to set up platforms. For information technology.
- i. Urge each government to provide incentives for private companies including tax incentives so that they can actively assist in narrowing the information divide.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Digital divide leaves out a certain part of the society from the benefits of information society and exacerbates the income gap. In order to narrow the digital gap, we need to ensure that everyone equally shares the benefits of the information society. This can be achieved by:

1. Increasing the Internet capabilities of the general public while creating an environment where everyone can gain access to the Internet
2. Providing broadband Internet service to all remote areas.

3. Installing free Internet facilities in the major public places of smaller townships
4. Developing new ICT equipment to make it easier for the physically challenged to use the Internet.

