

Communication project of the Cameroonian delegation to the preconference of the Legislative Libraries section

Presentation:

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It is a distinct honour for us to speak here today and share with you a novel initiative that was undertaken for the first time at the National Assembly of Cameroon: parliamentary information days held at the beginning of the legislative session.

But before we get to that, allow me to present a very brief description of the National Assembly of Cameroon.

I. Presentation of the National Assembly

1) Composition of the Chamber

- The National Assembly comprises 180 members elected by direct and secret universal suffrage for a five-year term of office;
- Term system: the National Assembly sits three times a year for 30 days at a time, maximum (March, June and November);
- Five political parties are represented (RDPC, SDF, UNDP, UDC, MP).

2) Governing bodies

- The National Assembly Bureau, comprising 23 members;
- The Conference of Presidents.

3) General Secretariat

- The General Secretariat assists the members in carrying out their mandates, and includes an Administration Division.

II. Parliamentary information days

1. How were they instituted?

It all began with the lack of communication observed in previous sessions. It was noted that when newly elected members arrived at the Assembly at the beginning of the legislative session, they needed to know more about the institution within which they were going to carry out their mandates. This explains why the General Secretariat took specific measures to ensure the best initiation possible. They felt it critical not only to provide the members with essential information on the institution's functioning, but also to explain to them the various benefits provided by the Parliament's Administration. That is why, instead of a narrow view on an open-door day dedicated to a single library, it was decided to organize more open parliamentary information days so that a multitude of information could be disseminated. As might be expected, these encounters between the elected members and the Administration raised a certain amount of enthusiasm among the members and a manifest desire within Parliament's Administration to demonstrate its managerial capacities.

Generally speaking, these days aimed to reassure the national representatives of the existence of a modern Administration that was prepared to provide all the technical support they needed. Therefore, it was an opportunity to raise awareness, exchange views, and above all, take into consideration the members' concerns in view of improving the quality of service.

2. Functioning of the days

They took place from August 29 to 31, 2007 in the reception hall of the Assembly, where each division occupied a designated space. All the divisions involved made a great effort to give Parliament the best possible image.

- A. The information Division presented the library and its acquisitions policy, the archives where the legislative texts are carefully preserved, and the website, the true window on our institution.

- B. The Hôtel des députés, which handles the accommodations and food services for the members during their terms, kept the members apprised of the conditions of their stay during the sessions.
- C. The Finance and Budget Division presented the Assembly's financial system (member prices, parliamentary claims, names of transportation companies and other benefits provided under the regulations).
- D. The Administration Division covered health-related issues (health care insurance, medico-social centre) and the makeup of the members' administrative files.
- E. The Legislative Division explained the legislative procedures and the monitoring of government actions.

In a kind of seductive rivalry, the various divisions, adorned with their most beautiful attributes, competed skilfully for three days to communicate to the members the information they required. The Library and Archives Division, which took part in these demonstrations, was particularly set apart, not only by its excellent presentation of the structures, but also by its distribution to each member of a basic documentation kit that included a copy of the internal rules, a Constitution and a member's handbook. Thus, it was an opportunity for our divisions to do some lobbying.

3. Members' concerns

For the most part, they concerned the modernization of the Assembly's working procedures and the increased skills required.

4. Results

With respect to the immediate results of these information days, we may congratulate ourselves on the fact that, shortly after this forum, training in new information and communications technologies (NICT) was provided with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This salutary assistance by the UNDP enabled:

- Renewal of our website, which is now more attractive;
- Initiation of parliamentarians and staff to new information and communications technologies (NICT).

Moreover, the General Secretariat recently created email addresses for all members with a view to promoting electronic exchanges.

Ultimately, we think that these information days had a particularly elucidating effect, and our hope is that they will be continued, because they have enabled us to equip the members from

the onset of the session. Is it not said that a leader must be well informed in order to make sound decisions?