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**Geert Jan Hamilton,
Secretary-General of the Senate of the Netherlands**

The Dutch Senate: a paperless parliament

On 13 September 2011 the Senate of the Dutch Parliament has started to distribute its meeting documents to its 75 Senators by tablet computer. At the start of the first session after the summer recess, the Senators each received an iPad with an application (App) designed especially for the Senate. The Members of the Senate can use this modern communication tool to consult and manage the complete information flow of calendars, legislative bills, parliamentary correspondence and other meeting documents.

With that, the Senate of the States General took the step to switch completely to the digital provision of information. Although several parliaments throughout Europe are working on the further digitisation of their documents, the Dutch Senate is the first to completely switch to meetings which are fully based on the use of tablet computers by parliamentarians.

In doing so, the Senate is breaking with an almost 200-year history of distributing bills, letters from the government, reports and other meeting documents in printed form. All of this post generated thousands of pages of printed matter per Senator per week, which had to be delivered to the homes of the Senators by courier until now. And since national parliaments have been allowed to state their opinions on policy proposals of the European Union, the amount of parliamentary post has grown even further. From now on, the 75 Senators will be able to view all documents directly on their iPads

and add notes to meeting documents. The calendar 'links' directly to the national and European files.

Senate continues to takes the lead in digital innovation

The Senators received the iPads, which will remain the property of the Senate, at a special meeting prior to the first regular plenary meeting following the summer recess. At this occasion the introduction of the tablet computer was marked as a defining moment in the history of the Senate. The Senate which is housed in a historical 17th century building at the 'Binnenhof' in The Hague, is sometimes burdened with a 'dull' image, but besides quality and meticulousness, transparency and working efficiently are held in high regard. This is why the Senate has continued to take the lead in the Dutch government circuit when it comes to digital information provision and rapid communication. The Senate was also quick to introduce new communication tools in previous decades, such as making parliamentary papers available via the Internet in 1994, and launching a user-friendly website in 1997. The websites of the Senate have won awards on several occasions for their excellent accessibility.

The President of the Senate G.J. (Fred) de Graaf launched the new working procedure with two official acts. First, he unveiled a work of art by artist Jos van den Berg and graphic designer Cees van Ruten. It concerns a relief, cut from pieces of glued parliamentary papers. The creation is called *Pre-iPad Parliament* , and marks the transition from the printed order of the meeting to the digital form. He then officially launched the new Senate App.

Reliable and sustainable

The introduction of the iPad was preceded by careful preparations, which included the development of software for the efficient management of calendars and complete bill dossiers. The decision was based partly on considerations concerning sustainability and cost

efficiency. Practical advantages, such as efficient recordkeeping and continuous updating of calendars and files also played an important role.

The Senate developed the system in cooperation with the 'Knowledge and Operations Centre for Official Government Publications' (*Kennis- en Exploitatiecentrum Officiële Overheidspublicaties*) (a division of ICTU) and PDC Information Architecture. The application itself was designed and delivered by a contracted ICT service provider. The App was tested thoroughly during the summer recess. This showed that the electronic publication of parliamentary papers is efficient, dependable and reliable. Wireless communication is supported by the 21 Wi-Fi transmitters located in the historic Senate building as of early September.

With the system, which is now operational, the Senate want to take a front position in the application of technology in the context of the paperless government. The introduction of the tablet computers and the development of the App are associated with an investment of €148,000. Much of this amount will be recouped in the first year through a fundamental reduction in the costs of printing and courier services for the Senate. These amount to €142,686 (price level 2010). In time, the savings on the Senate's overheads can increase even further.

The Senate of The Netherlands is interested in exchanging experience with other parliaments on the use of electronic devices as a replacement of paper flows.