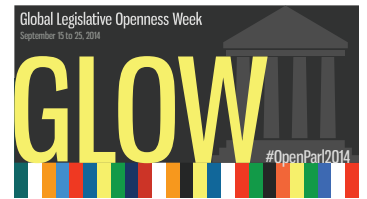




SUNLIGHT
FOUNDATION

OpeningParliament.org



Dear Madame/Sir President of the Legislature,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, write to encourage you and the legislative body you lead to publish information produced by your legislature in a way that empowers your constituents to understand and engage with your work to the maximum extent possible, as part of your commitment to transparency and openness.

The notion that parliamentarians serve at the behest of citizens is fundamental to democratic governance. Parliaments hold information not for themselves but as stewards of the public good, and information on and by legislatures thus *belongs* to the citizens. The principle of openness enjoys the broad support of a variety of international bodies such as the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas and the Open Government Partnership. It is also enshrined in the *Declaration on Parliamentary Openness*¹, a call to parliaments for an increased commitment to openness, endorsed by more than 150 of the world's leading parliamentary monitoring organizations² and a number of international associations of parliaments and MPs³.

Public access to legislative data is already bringing lawmaking into the 21st century around the world. Parliamentary monitoring organizations often develop software that makes it easier for constituents to get in touch with their representatives (and vice versa), create visualizations that track the history of a particular issue and its supporters, illustrate how a bill has changed over time, or develop customized alert systems to follow legislative actions.⁴

These initiatives are designed to strengthen and modernize legislatures, helping parliamentarians to respond to the challenge of declining trust in governing institutions worldwide, and to better represent and engage with an increasingly technology-enabled public. Proactive data sharing gives both parliaments and citizens access to low-cost tools for enhancing outreach, communication, monitoring and advocacy. It also strengthens non-governmental organizations, empowering them to interact with elected

¹ For the full text of the Declaration, see: <http://www.openingparliament.org/declaration>

² For a comprehensive list of all the organizations supporting the Declaration, see: <http://www.openingparliament.org/organizations>

³ The Declaration has been endorsed by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)'s Parliamentary Assembly, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and an Organization of American States (OAS) conference of congressional leadership from the Americas, among others.

⁴ For case stories and examples of civic initiatives that make use of parliamentary data, see: <http://www.openingparliament.org/> and <http://www.openingparliament.org/casestudies>, <http://poplus.org/> and <https://www.mysociety.org/projects/parliamentarymonitoring/>

officials, and giving them a greater understanding of the laws and legislative actions that affect their lives.

Many parliaments, however, unnecessarily limit citizen access to crucial data by providing certain information only upon request, or in closed formats that restrict constituents in their ability to access, search, analyze and reuse data. Civil society organizations often must work tirelessly to liberate the information, often through scraping (a term used in computer programming that describes the act of extracting desired information from a website), but also via individual freedom of information requests, processing paper records, or other time-consuming methods.

In recognition of the Global Legislative Openness Week⁵, the international community of parliamentary monitoring organizations is now calling on all national legislatures in the world to make parliamentary data **open by default**. According to the *Declaration on Parliamentary Openness*, 'open by default' means:

- the proactive release of data,
- in open and structured formats, and
- free of charge.

While different legislatures face different circumstances around the world, we recognize major progress toward "open by default" data publication when, for example, votes or other key legislative information are published online for the first time, or, when data access is improved in such a way to improve the work of civil society organizations by making scraping and arduous data processing unnecessary.

Often the most interesting, informative, or innovative applications of government data require the use of a computer to search, sort, or transform it into new forms that allow for comparison or analysis. While formats such as HTML and PDF are easily accessible for humans, they are difficult for computers to process. Providing data in structured formats, such as JSON and XML, add significant ease to access and allow more advanced analysis, especially with large amounts of information.

We believe it is time for parliamentarians around the world to strengthen their roles as representatives elected *by* and *for* the public, and embrace new technologies that are changing how societies connect, communicate and govern.

As partners in your efforts, the global community of parliamentary monitoring organizations stands ready to discuss your concerns, collaborate on overcoming technical or institutional challenges, or to help create a plan of action to strengthen legislative transparency. If you have any further questions, please contact us at openingparliament.org/contact.

Sincerely,

The global civil society community

⁵ For more information on the GLOW events, see: <http://openparl2014.org/>

Albania

MJAFT! Movement

Argentina

Asociación por los Derechos Civiles
Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIPPEC)
Directorio Legislativo
Fundación Directorio Legislativo
Poder Ciudadano
Public Policies Lab

Australia

OpenAustralia Foundation

Austria

Forum Informationsfreiheit

Bangladesh

Transparency International Bangladesh

Belgium

WeCitizens

Bolivia

Bolivia Transparente

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Centers for Civic Initiatives
Public Interest Advocacy Center - CPI Foundation
Zašto ne

Burkina Faso

Open Knowledge Burkina Faso

Cameroon

AfroLeadership

Canada

OpenNorth

Chile

Chile Transparente
Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente

Colombia

Congreso Visible
Instituto de Ciencia Política
Transparencia por Colombia

Croatia

Code for Croatia
GONG
Otvoreni Zagreb (Open Zagreb)

Democratic Republic of Congo

Centre National d'Appui au Développement et à la Participation Populaire (CENADEP)

Ecuador

Observatorio Legislativo

El Salvador

The Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development

European Union

OpenForum Europe
Parlorama
Parltrack

Finland

Open Knowledge Finland

France

Regards Citoyens
République Citoyenne

Germany

Open Knowledge Germany
OpenGovLD project

Greece

Vouliwatch

Georgia

JumpStart Georgia
Transparency International Georgia

Guatemala

Acción Ciudadana
Congreso Transparente

Hungary

K-Monitor

India

Center for Legislative Research and Advocacy (CLRA)

Indonesia

PATTIRO

Israel

Hasadna

Italy

Depp.it

Jordan

Al Quds Center for Political Studies
Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development

Kenya

Mzalendo
Open Institute

Kosovo

Instituti Kosovar për Kërkime dhe Zhvillime të Politikave (KIPRED)

Kyrgyzstan

Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society

Liberia

Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD)
Naymote

Mexico

Arena Ciudadana
Borde Político
Consorcio Parlamentario para el Diálogo y la Equidad
Fundar
Impacto Legislativo

La Asociación Civil Gestión Social y Cooperación (GESOC)
Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO)
Open Intelligence (OPI)
Social Tic
Sonora Ciudadana
Visión Legislativa
Transparencia Mexicana

Montenegro

Centar za demokratsku tranziciju (CDT)

Multi-national

Access Info Europe
Africa Freedom of Information Centre
TechSoup Europe
Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency
Open Knowledge

Netherlands

Open State Foundation

Nigeria

Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)

Norway

Holder de ord

Pakistan

Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT)

Paraguay

Semillas para la democracia

Peru

Asociación Civil Transparencia
Reflexión Democrática

Poland

Association 61
ePaństwo Foundation

Romania

Institute for Public Policy

Serbia

Sajt Centra za istraživanje, transparentnost i odgovornost (CRTA)

South Africa

Parliamentary Monitoring Group

South Korea

Team POPONG

Spain

Civio
Qué hacen los diputados
CIECODE-Responsable Proyecto Avizor
Open Knowledge Spain

Tunisia

Al Bawsala

Uganda

Media Initiative for Open Governance in Uganda

United Kingdom

Open Knowledge
Request Initiative

Uruguay

Centro de Archivos y Acceso a la Información Pública (CAInfo)
DATAUruguay

United States of America

Azavea
Brechner Center for Freedom of Information, University of Florida
CREW
GovTrack.us
Government Accountability Project
iSalon.org
OpenTheGovernment.org
Sunlight Foundation

Venezuela

Transparencia Venezuela