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by

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on

“The Renovation of the Dutch Parliament”

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Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to meet you all here today.

I want to thank the parliament of Rwanda for the excellent organization of this conference. After meetings in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and ZOOM in the past years, it is great to be able to hold this conference now on the African continent.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to share some thoughts regarding the renovation of parliamentary buildings. At this moment, the parliamentary complex of the Netherlands is undergoing a large scale renovation.

The two chambers of the Dutch parliament, the Senate and the House of Representatives, are situated in the city of The Hague in the so called 'Binnenhof complex'. Also the Council of State and the Ministry of General Affairs are situated there. The monumental complex has been the center of Dutch politics for centuries. The plenary hall of the Dutch Senate at the Binnenhof complex is the oldest parliamentary hall in Europe that is still being used as such.

The complex however, which is owned by the Central Government Real Estate Agency, is plagued by a wide variety of technical and structural defects. Large-scale renovation is required to ensure the safety of visitors to the complex and an improvement in the working conditions of those who work there. Also, the renovation is crucial to the long-term maintenance of our cultural heritage.

Due to the renovation, our parliament temporarily moved to another location last year. The Senate is now situated in a former city palace in The Hague, that used to be the home of the Royal Library and the Supreme Court in the past.

Some of you might have experienced a temporary rehousing of your parliament in the past. Those colleagues will probably agree that this is a major and very complex operation. However, after the relocation of the parliament, the real job only has to start: the renovation of the parliamentary complex.

Dear colleagues

I am sharing with you some insights about the renovation of our parliamentary complex and the related governance process, with regard to three topics:

- The conflict between history and future
- The factor time
- The complexity of dealing with different stakeholders

Many of the parliamentary buildings around the world are historic buildings, with monumental value, as is also the case with the parliamentary complex of the

Netherlands. This gives an extra element to the renovation, because the historic character of the buildings raises boundaries with regard to the scope of the renovation due to regulations on the preservation of cultural heritage.

This might provide a conflict with other interests, for example the need to transform our building to a workplace of the future, with modern facilities regarding for example ICT, accessibility and other facilities.

Another important factor is time: a large scale renovation takes several years to prepare and to complete. In the case of the Netherlands, the decision to renovate the Binnenhof complex was taken seven years ago in 2015, while the preparation started in 2016. The end of the total renovation is officially foreseen in 2026, which is eleven years after the initial decision.

In this period of time, needs and wishes can change. The plans that were made in 2016, might be totally outdated now. For example, in the mean time we experienced a pandemic, which got us familiar with working from home and increasingly using digital sources. Also, the legislation and standard with regard to security, accessibility changed over the years. And the number of parliamentary staff of the Dutch Senate has increased significantly over the last two years due to several reasons. All this has consequences for the renovation project. In other words: initial plans may need changes during the project, which might also have consequences for the duration and costs of the project.

Thirdly, the renovation of the Dutch parliamentary building brings forward some challenges regarding governance and the involvement of different stakeholders. The Dutch government is the owner of the Binnenhof complex, and pays for the renovation. The renovation is being supervised by the Government Real Estate Agency. However, among the users of the complex are the both chambers of parliament and the Council of State. Furthermore, the municipality of the city of The Hague has also a role to play, as well as the responsible architect. Within the chambers of parliament, it is the politicians that have a say, but also the civil servants under leadership of the Secretary-General.

In other words: the presence of these different stake holders, that all have their own role, their own interests and their own responsibility, makes the project very complex. It is very important to make sure that roles and responsibilities are not getting mixed up, and that information is being shared with the right players at the right time.

Dear colleagues,

Renovation of parliamentary buildings is a topic that is particularly suited for an organization like ASGP, to discuss related elements, to share experiences and to exchange information with each other. All our parliamentary buildings will need renovation at some moment in time, so it is a topic that many of us will have to deal with during their mandate as secretary general.

I would like to explore whether it would be useful to set up a group of colleagues that recently dealt with a renovation project, are dealing with it at this moment or will have to deal with it in the near future, to share our experiences and learn from each other where possible. We might be able to meet in the margins of the ASGP-sessions. I hope that some colleagues would be interested to join this group, so we could further develop this idea together.

Thank you.