Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting the Belgian Development co-operation to your seminar!

The Belgian Cooperation supports three types of capacity building of Parliaments:
- We organize seminars for Members of Parliament of ACP countries;
- We fund a UNDP programme;
- We fund activities of AWEPA (the Association of Western Parliamentarians on Africa).

Let me highlight for you the main elements of these three interventions.

I would like to focus on the main programme of our EU Unit, but allow me to provide you first some elements of our relations with AWEPA and UNDP.

Belgium gives financial support to AWEPA since 1994. Since 1998 our attention goes primarily to the activities of AWEPA in the Great Lakes Region as they contribute to our overall policy of preventive diplomacy and support to the democratic process in Central Africa. In 2004, Belgium has financed AWEPA for an amount of 500,000 Euro for its programme 2004-2005 on “Preventive diplomacy and democratization in Central Africa”.
AWEPA works to support the well functioning of parliaments in Africa and to keep Africa on the political agenda in Europe.

Action is undertaken for human resource development with parliamentarians and other elected representatives and institutional capacity building within parliaments and decentralized authorities. This includes attention to:

- the key role of well-functioning parliaments with regards to democracy, human rights and peaceful conflict management;
- the attainment of gender equality at all levels of political decision-making;
- African-European sharing of parliamentary experience;
- building parliamentary networks at national, regional and inter-regional levels as fora for political and non-governmental interaction

AWEPA also informs and mobilizes European parliamentarians on policy issues in African-European relations, development cooperation and democratization in Africa.

As for our cooperation with UNDP, I can refer to the first Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS I) that was launched in May 1999. Its overall objective is to strengthen the capacity of parliaments and to improve the ability of elected officials to represent and be accountable to the will of the people. The second UNDP Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS II) covers the period 2004-2007. Belgium provides a contribution of 6 MEURO.

GPPS II pursues three interrelated strategies.

1. **Country Level Projects** focus on testing alternative parliamentary development approaches in country level projects;

2. **Regional Level Initiatives**: The pilot efforts will be strengthened and the learning disseminated by regional training and networking initiatives. Where possible, regional
initiatives will engage regional parliamentary associations or institutions with a secondary objective of strengthening their capacity through the process.

(3) At the **global level**, GPPS II studies key political variables that may be critical to an improved understanding of how parliamentary democracy can be strengthened and/or impacted in developing countries. Issues such as parliaments’ role in conflict mediation/resolution will be studied in greater detail. Activities to network and support women parliamentarians will be undertaken as will those which seek to gender parliamentary debate and process.

This UNDP-Programme seeks to intervene in fragile democracies where support is most needed.

Belgium engaged a total of 6 millions euros (4 years, 2004/2007) for “2 Regions” in Africa:
Region 1: West Africa: Niger and Benin;
Region 2: Arab States: Morocco and Algeria

The third programme that is supported by Belgium is related to the Cotonou Agreement, the framework for the economic, political and development relations of the European **Union with countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.**

The objectives of the ACP Parliamentarian seminars are:

1. To **inform MPs** on the main elements of the Cotonou Agreement and the major changes compared to the Lomé Conventions. The participation of civil society in the implementation of ACP-EU cooperation is highlighted.
2. To explore the practical implications of these changes for the African countries.
3. To **clarify the role of national Parliaments** in the review, monitoring and control of country cooperation programmes under the Cotonou Agreement.
4. To launch a constructive **dialogue** between MPs and State and **non-State actors** in relation to national priorities.
5. To explore ways of enhancing the link between the national Parliament and the Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly.

Seminars were organized in Ethiopia, Niger, Rwanda, Benin, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. A regional seminar was held in Cape Town, in the premises of the Parliament of South Africa. Several parliamentary delegations of Southern Africa of the SACU area (customs union of South Africa and its neighboring countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland) were present.

This pilot project could be carried out thanks to the commitment of the ACP Parliaments themselves, to the support of the European Centre for Development Policy Management, of the delegations of the European Commission and of the Belgian embassies.

We think this initiative contributes to strengthening good governance. Members of Parliament do became aware that, for instance, the European Development Fund (EDF) finances the budget of their government. Parliamentary action, and in particular budgetary control, is vital for a correct use of the budget and constitutes a major contribution in the fight against corruption. The parliamentarians often noted that they were hardly consulted, or not at all, in the establishment and decisions making process of the National Indicative Programme of their country.

We hope that these parliamentary seminars contributed to better preparing national delegations for the meetings of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

This is not just a matter of “face validity”! We actually submitted evaluation forms to the 1500 participants! Their answers are eloquent. Here are some replies to the questions:

1. *Do you think that this seminar will contribute to make parliamentary work more effective with regard to EU cooperation with your country?*

   Answer: Yes (82 %)   Partially (18 %)   No (0 %, or only 6 answers)
2. Do you wish additional training on the Cotonou Agreement and its implementation?

Answer: Yes (97 %) No (3 %)

We excluded any granting of per diem, because we wished that members of Parliament participate by interest or sense of responsibility and not for money or cash. In case per diems appeared to be a pre-condition for organizing our training, we decided to scrap the whole exercise altogether. We trust that when 97% of the participants are asking for additional training, they are inspired by the ambition to be professionals and not by immediate cash flow!

We hope that the reinforcement process of Parliaments will become a part of the National Indicative Programmes (NIP) of each ACP-country.

At the occasion of the revision of the Cotonou Agreement, Belgium insisted on taking on board the promotion of the capacities of ACP-Parliaments through the inclusion of an explicit mention in the Agreement.

The revised text will, after its adoption and ratification, include a new article 58, which will read:

“Subject to the agreement of the ACP State or States concerned, the following shall also be eligible for financial support:

(a) national and/or regional public or semi-public agencies and departments of ACP States, including Parliaments, and, in particular, their financial institutions and development banks;”

Finally, another result of our initiative: the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly is preparing a report on the role of Parliaments in the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement. It will be on the agenda of the parliamentary Political Committee in
Brussels in September 2005. This will be followed by a debate in plenary session. Two co-rapporteurs will submit this report: Mr. Bwari Bwari (from the Nigerian parliament) and Mr. Mauro Zani (Italian member of the European Parliament).

This Belgian pilot project shows that training and practical experience linked to political action can be successful. Continuity and perseverance at the various levels of decision are crucial.

Thank you for your attention.