Commonwealth Parliamentarians examine legal frameworks for electronic commerce

24 April 2013, Yaoundé, Cameroon: At a special briefing session held at the Yaoundé Conference Centre, jointly organized by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization (CTO), a cross section of Commonwealth Parliamentarians from Australia, Cameroon, Namibia, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Republic of Tanzania examined international and regional best practices on key legal aspects of electronic commerce and cyber security.

Recognizing the central role played by Parliamentarians in reforming legislation to handle the transformation of commerce through ICTs, the three partner organizations came together to organize this briefing session to provide an opportunity for Commonwealth Parliamentarians to analyze legal and regulatory issues pertaining to electronic commerce, including legal recognition of electronic messaging for commerce and e-government, and addressing the perils of cybercrime and need for cyber security measures along with the role of Parliamentarians. Led by Prof Ian Walden, head of the Institute of Computer and Communications Law, Queen Mary, University of London, this interactive workshop also facilitated the sharing of experiences between Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth.

The group of Parliamentarians gathered in Cameroon deliberated at length on these issues and in the light of their discussions agreed on the following:

**Commonwealth level and beyond:**
- The need to share good practices regarding the various existing legal frameworks for e-commerce among Commonwealth Members so as further to harmonize and cooperate in this area through workshops at regional and international levels;
- The inclusion of the subject of ICT legal frameworks as part of annual CPA meetings at all levels;
- The development of closer cooperation between Commonwealth organizations, such as the CTO and CPA on the one hand, and relevant international organizations such as UNCTAD, IPU, ITU, INTERPOL, on the other, to increase members awareness on legal issues of e-commerce, including cybercrime and cyber security, data protection and privacy, consumer protection and online content control; and
- The need to encourage trans-border cooperation in response to cyber crimes and threats through the signing and ratification of international instruments.

**National level:**
- The need to involve all relevant stakeholders in reaching a common understanding of ICT-related issues, which should precede the preparation of ICT-related legislation including cybercrime and cyber security, data protection and privacy, consumer protection and online content control;
- The need to utilize specialized skills (experts) and peer-review mechanisms to enable law makers to understand and legislate appropriately in view of the ever evolving ICT landscape;
- The need to create awareness in both rural and urban areas, as well as among marginalized communities, about ICT opportunities and threats;
- The need for the creation of relevant institutions, e.g. Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and consumer protection agencies to ensure security and trust among users and providers of e-commerce and e-government services;
- The need to legislate appropriate laws to prevent cybercrimes and threats taking into account international model laws and other instruments of public laws in relevant areas such as the Commonwealth Model Law on Computer Crime; and
- The need to commit to the practical implementation of legislation on cyber security.

This workshop was held immediately prior to the Commonwealth Cyber security Forum 2013 of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation which will be held on 25 and 26 April 2013 at the same venue.