

EPARLIAMENT.ORG: THE PIONEERING OPERATIONAL MODEL OF WEBOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

The war in Iraq is widely perceived as the result of democratic and diplomatic deficits at a global level. Aftermath the polarization of opinions about the war, electorates have strong resentment that their elected representatives failed to represent themselves, and the “power elite” just ignored their say. Citizens now find themselves controlled by their politicians rather than being the one in control of their statesmen. They have also realized that the current system only empowers politicians, not people. Therefore, electorates want to redefine the meaning and *modus operandi* of democracy. Globally, citizens are aspiring for an “ALTERNATIVE” where they could represent themselves in order to overcome the prevalence of democratic and diplomatic deficits at all levels.

International terrorism is the result of lack of enforceable international law. International laws are not enforceable because the treaties and agreements, signed at bilateral and/or multilateral levels, lack uniformity. This led to the unjust design of policies on global issues. Even national legislators lack fora to express their views on global legal and policy-related issues. Therefore, the legal- and policy-making sectors desire for an “ALTERNATIVE” which could serve as an easily accessible clearinghouse and forum of international laws and policies so that the clearinghouse help them to ensure uniformity and enforceability.

Likewise, there are 38 armed conflicts, including the recent one in Iraq, in various regions of the world, particularly in the authoritarian regimes and transitional democracies in Asia, CIS and Africa. The conflicts have claimed millions of lives, mainly innocent women and children, and brought an end to human development! People in these regions are also desperate for an “ALTERNATIVE” which can bring the parties-in-conflict together as per their convenience and in a cost-effective manner so that they could live their normal life in peace, security and prosperity.

Corruption, lawlessness, information starvation, poverty, illiteracy are marked signs of the developing world in Asia, Africa, CIS and Latin America. Majority of population in this segment of the world lives with less than US\$2 a day! Locals are voiceless because they are either suppressed by the corrupt and authoritarian regimes or they could not afford, in terms of time and money, the existing legal mechanism for justice. They desperately want a cost-effective, easily accessible and secure “ALTERNATIVE” where they could approach at their convenience to settle their legal and social problems and speak up against atrocities by the “ruling elite”.

The search for an “ALTERNATIVE”, that our world is aspiring for, ends at eParliament.org, the pioneering operational model of webocracy. This paper elaborates how all of the above and more could be achieved through eParliament.org at this crucial juncture of human history when the democratically-elected, but much-debated, physical form of World Parliament seems a distant dream.

INTRODUCTION

The world has long been aspiring for a democratically-formed (elected?) body which can take humanitarian actions and peacemaking efforts at a global scale beyond the existing political boundaries since the breakout of WWI in 1914.

Post-WWI formation of League of Nations seemed to have provided adequate respite to the people till its un mourned demise in 1939 with the breakout of WWII.

There came in the UN in 1945. Critics, mostly utopians and communists, have been expressing their resentment about the veto power, bestowed to the five permanent member-states of the Security Council. They are also highly critical of the irrelevance of the UN General Assembly against the Security Council as and when critical decision are to be made.

With the breakout of war in Iraq, the world is skeptical about the efficacy of the UN to prevent the War and promote disarmament, although the UN and her incumbent Secretary-General were honored with Nobel Peace Prize in 2001! The war to disarm Iraq seemed to have disarmed the UN and her Security Council, and divided the Europe from America!

Meanwhile, a group, World Constitution and Parliament Association, has been endeavouring to form a World Parliament (formerly World Constituent Assembly) since 1958 to replace the UN with a World Government?! In 1991, the group has ratified an Earth Constitution.

Interestingly, Garry Davis,⁸¹ a WWII bomber pilot, has shun his US citizenship to declare himself a "World Citizen" (an *Excludable Alien* officially) 55 years ago and has been running World Service Authority in a small room with a computer in Washington DC and issuing "World Citizenship, Passport, Currencies in Kilowatts and Memberships!"

In the meantime, a paper, *Towards Global Parliament*, by Professors Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80,

No.1) seems to have renewed the debate of World Parliament.

Inspired by the writing, the UK-based Earth Action International has come up with a discussion group, e-parl.net, for the elected legislators recently. Likewise, Baltic Institute has launched eparliament.net as a discussion forum for youths of age group of 15-25 years. Several websites (alliance21.org, worldfederalist.org, opendemocracy.org, ubuntu.org, quadem.org etc.) have come into being, promoting the concept of World Parliament and World Government. Also, political parties like Virtual and Global Social Democratic Party (virglob-sp.org), Transnational Radical Party (radicalparty.org) have also popped up with the objectives similar to World Parliament and Government.

It is worth mention here that all of the above initiatives (run by a homogenous groups with contributors having similar social, political and economic backgrounds) to devise a World Parliament come under severe criticism with labels like utopian, anti-capitalist, self-selected, unrepresentative and, therefore, lacks legitimacy. Political powers also are not ready to surrender their national sovereignty in the name of "global citizen democracy." Some presume the risk that such a body could become, in the future, a place for absolute, dictatorial power, controlled by few individuals.

Joseph S Nye Jr. who is Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University labelled the entire concept as "Parliament of Dreams!" (*The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone?*, Oxford University Press, 2002)

Similarly, Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, Honorable Dr. Marcus Einfeld, AO, QC, while delivering his address to the 3rd International Conference of the Chief Justices of the World, also voiced his reservations over the success of World Parliament, adding "I do not think that such a parliament can come up in my lifetime, Maybe, the next generation might witness it." (*The Indian Express*, December 9, 2002)

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

There comes in eParliament.org which is “an independent of humanity towards peace, justice, human rights and freedom” (Jagdish Gandhi, 2002 Unesco Peace Prize Laureate). The driving principles of eParliament.org are universality, Netjustice, social change, grassroots democracy, decentralization, nonviolence, respect for diversity, personal and local responsibility, community-based solutions to world problems and future-focus. This pioneering model of webocracy with the help of communications, interaction and access tools of ICTs:

- Balances the state sovereignty with the citizen democracy,
- Allows global interest groups to interact without having to rely on national governments as intermediaries,
- Represents all walks of life from people to governments,
- Fulfils the gap of democratic and diplomatic deficits,
- Encourages an informal bottom-up process to supplement the formal process of cooperative relations among states and intra-state rival groups,
- Generates a harmony between the globalization of market and politics,
- Empowers states and other private centres of power like MFC, civil society etc. to counter the emerging terrorists and criminal groups,

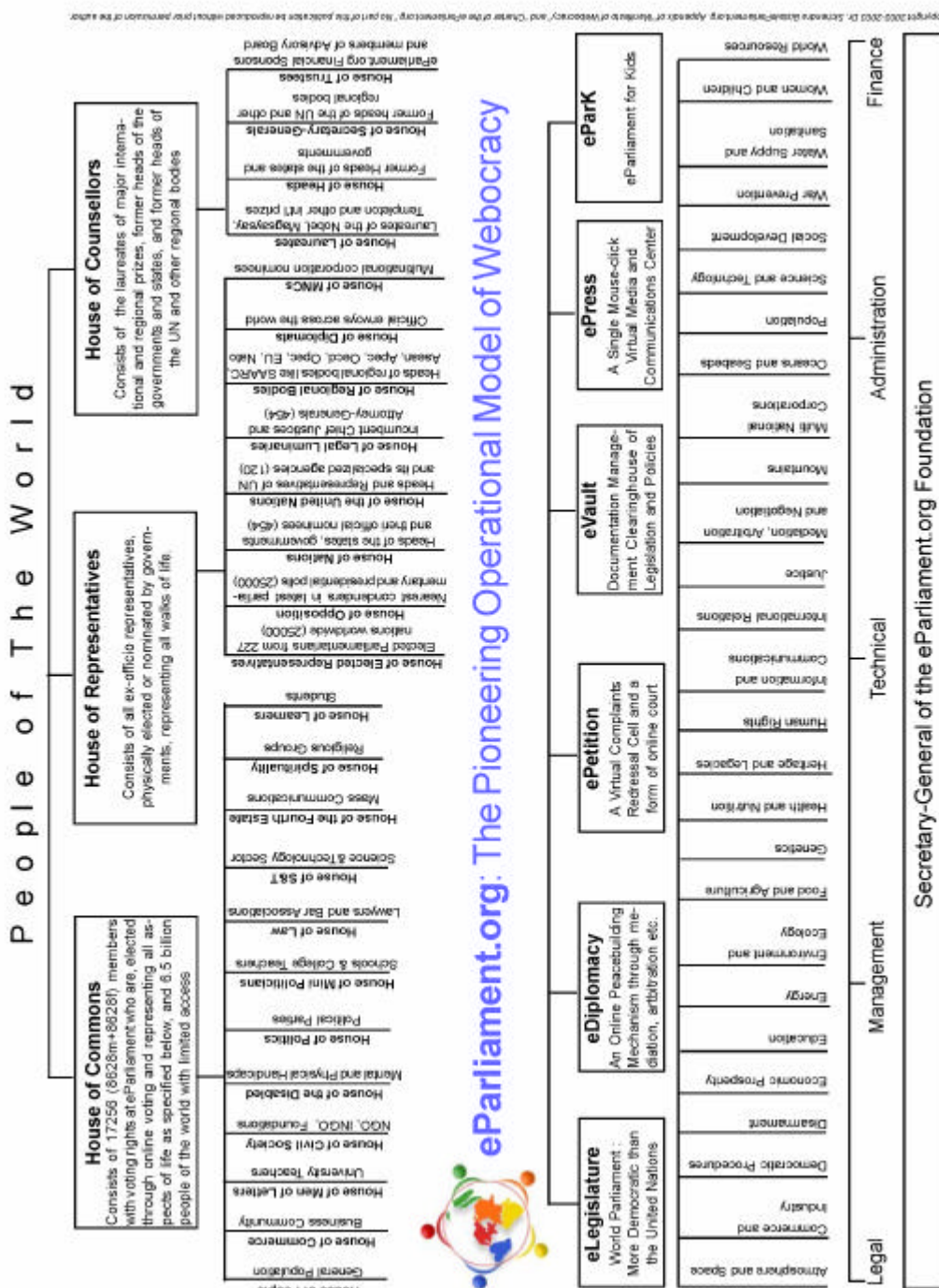
- Promotes international democracy and peace by facilitating the exercise of civil and political rights, by providing greater clarity of democracy, richer understanding of accountability and encouraging a willingness to experiment, and
- Enables faster, fairer, integrated and seamless pro-public services as opposed to the delayed services from the planned sectors like bureaucracy and corporate sector.

Honestly speaking, eParliament.org was originally conceptualized to overcome the political imbroglio that my country, Nepal, is facing due to the armed communist rebellion and the bloodless coup of the elected prime minister by the monarch on October 4, 2002 leading to a state of emergency and self-censorship of media!

Besides, technical and methodological objectives of eParliament.org are:

- Development of modular architecture of the system to support the organisational objectives as stated above
- Design and implementation of methodological framework of the web-based model of democracy to do Netjustice.

STRUCTURE



As featured in the figure above, the eParliament.org constitutes three houses:

- 1) House of Commons: It will consist of 17256 (half of them females) members with official voting rights at eParliament who will be elected through online voting. The number has been calculated from the world population data (US Census Bureau, *International Data Base 2003-2050*) with 2 nations with 1

billion+ population electing 6 male and 6 female representatives to each of the Houses below, 9 nations with population between a billion and 100 million electing 5 males and 5 females, 79 countries with population between 100 million and 10 million electing 4 male and 4 female representatives, 75 nations with population between 10 million and 1 million electing 3 males and 3 females, 39 states with

population between 1 million and 100,000 electing 2 males and 2 females and 33 countries with less than 100,000 population electing 1 male and 1 female representatives to each House as specified below. However,

individuals and institutions representing all walks of life will be part of the House of Commons with some restricted access. House of Commons is further divided into the following:

S. No.	Name of Houses	Representation from
A	House of People	General Population
B	House of Trade and Commerce	Business Community
C	House of Men of Letters	University Teachers
D	House of Civil Society	NGOs, INGOs, Foundations
E	House of the Disabled	Mental and Physical Handicaps
F	House of Politics	Political Parties
G	House of Mini-Politicians	School and College Teachers
H	House of Law	Lawyers and Bar Associations
I	House of Science and Technology	Science and Technology Sector
J	House of the Fourth Estate	Mass Communications
K	House of Spirituality	Religious Groups
L	House of Learners	Students

1) House of Representatives: This house is formed of all ex-officio representatives, physically elected or

nominated by governments and rebel groups. The House is further divided into 8 sub-Houses:

S. No.	Name of Houses	Representation from	Number
A	House of Elected Representatives	Elected parliamentarians from 227 nations worldwide	25000
B	House of Opposition	Nearest contenders in latest parliamentary or presidential polls and rebel groups	25000+
C	House of Nations	Heads of the states, governments and their official nominees	454
D	House of the United Nations	Heads and representatives of UN and its specialized agencies	120
E	House of Legal Luminaries	Incumbent Chief Justices and Attorney-Generals	454
F	House of Regional Bodies	Heads of regional bodies like SAARC, ASEAN, APEC, NATO, EU, OPEC, OECD etc.	NA
G	House of Diplomats	Official envoys across the world	NA
H	House of MNCs	Nominees from the multi-national corporations	NA

3) House of Counsellors: This House consists of the laureates of major international and regional awards and prizes, and regional prizes, former heads of the states and

governments and former heads of the UN and other regional bodies. Each member will have a vote. This House is further divided into four others houses:

S.No.	Name of the Houses	Representations from
A	House of Laureates	Laureates of Nobel, Magsaysay, Templeton and other accolades
B	House of Heads	Former heads of the states and governments
C	House of Secretary-Generals	Former Heads of the UN and other regional bodies
D	House of Trustees	Financial sponsors and members of the Advisory Board of eParliament.org

There are two ways to count online ballots: 1) Number of votes each individual representative voted for and against, and 2) Ye/Nay approval from each individual (24) sub-Houses.

SERVICES AND AGENDA

eParliament.org six different modular application framework, driven by a single database. They are:

- 1) eLegislature: This is the world parliament which will be more democratic than the UN. It exactly mimics the *modus operandi* and constitution of the physical parliaments. The elected members of the three major Houses above will have unrestricted rights here. They can also activate denial of service to unauthorized visitors. However, commoners other than elected ones have limited access to this service.
- 2) eDiplomacy: This is an online conflict-resolution and peacebuilding mechanism through secure and confidential online meetings, negotiation, mediation and arbitration when it becomes inconvenient, impractical or impossible to conduct physical face-to-face meetings between or among the conflicting parties due to ideological extremity, limitation of time, scarcity of funds, physical availability or geography.
- 3) ePetition: This is a virtual, but public, grievances redressal cell and a form of online court. ePetition process is faster, fairer and non-bureaucratic, and non-compliance would be imposed by damaged reputations through ePress.
- 4) eVault: It is a documentation management clearinghouse of legislative and policy templates, and meant for

ensuring uniform law and policy formulation. Member of House of Law and House of Legal Luminaries will have unrestricted access to this service.

- 5) ePress: This is a single mouse-click media and communications center for public relations. This will also facilitate mediapeople to filter their inboxes from redundant mails, mainly press releases (like the political one sent to science editor!?)
- 6) eParK: “An important feature of eParliament is eParK or eParliament for Kids to help them vent their frustrations about the global unrest, express what they passionately feel and to communicate to the world of their wants and expectations” (Jagdish Gandhi, 2002 UNESCO Peace Prize laureate while endorsing eParliament.org on behalf of 27000+ students and 2500 staffs at the world’s largest school at the end of his presentation, *Evolution and Revolution of the World’s Largest School*, CMS, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2002)

To facilitate proceedings, world problems are further categorised into 27 different agendas for discussion and to facilitate informed decision making process: 1) Atmosphere and Space, 2) Commerce and Industry, 3) Democratic Structures, 4) Disarmament and Peace, 5) Economic Prosperity, 6) Education, 7) Energy, 8) Environment and Ecology, 9) Food and Agriculture, 10) Genetics, 11) Health and Nutrition, 12) Heritage and Legacies, 13) Human Rights, 14) Information and Communications, 15) International Relations, 16) Justice, 17) Mediation, Arbitration and Negotiations, 18) Mountains, 19) Multi-National Corporations, 20) Oceans and Seabeds, 21) Population, 22) Science and

Technology, 23) Social Development, 24) War Prevention, 25) Water Supply and Sanitation, 26) Women and Children, and 27) World Resources.

But, from the users' perspective, s/he will just get a dashboard (like myyahoo) when s/he registers at eParliament.org. Against registration, the member would be provided with a wide range of integrated services free. Technically speaking, I have a vision to transform eParliament.org into an online, easily accessible, user-friendly and funny platform that provides practical, seamless and integrated solutions to people's day-to-day problems, ranging from contact management to court procedures, messaging to mass-mobilization. My years of research gives no clues to what I have been trying to achieve through eParliament.org, although there are two sites with similar naming, but one is "much-hyped" (e-parl.net) and the other is for youngsters' discussion board (e-parliament.net).

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

eParliament.org executive team (will be eParliament Foundation) will consist of 5 departments: management, administration, technical, legal and electoral which will be headed by Secretary-General. On availability of funding, regional bodies in all five continents would be set up. The departmental staffs will be paid. However, all other participants and actors will work voluntary without any pay.

INCORPORATION

In order to maintain its independence and allowing itself "to become a much-needed venue for global interest groups to interact without having to rely on national governments as intermediaries" (Falk and Strauss, *WorldLink*, July 2002), eParliament.org will not be incorporated under any national governments and laws except with the UN and regional bodies. It will be entirely virtual voluntary organization (VVO) and none of the participants except full-timers get financial benefits. eParliament.org will, in the future, has already applied for the international domain name, eParliament.int.

Since the .int requires inter-governmental charter, I am at the final stage of drafting "Manifesto of Webocracy" and "Charter of the eParliament." These two documents would be forwarded to heads of the states and governments worldwide for endorsement and ratification.

FINANCIAL SUSTENANCE

eParliament.org does not accept any form of assistance which violates fundamental principles, stated above. It solicits seed money, grant, donations and trusteeship from individuals and independent organizations. At present, financial contributions are NOT tax-deductible as it preferred to remain a VVO to maintain its independence and integrity rather than coming under the jurisdiction of any national laws.

However, all efforts would be considered to make eParliament.org financially sustainable and viable. Chief Architect of eParliament.org has devised a world of ideas in making eParliament financially independent.

So far, the Chief Architect of the eParliament.org has contributed financially and through his technical skills equivalent to some US\$100000 (including system design and other online costs including webhosting and domain registration fees with the previous host), Rawserve.com has donated a webspace worth US\$140 and other services worth some US\$1000. A web-designing company from the US has agreed to donate a design template worth US\$250.

FUTURE

The wide range of integrated services of eParliament.org would be made available free (except for premium services) to the entire developed world by 2005 end and to the rest of the world by 2010 or sooner by encouraging or in partnership with the developers of affordable and ingenious technologies like Simputer.

The outcomes of the eParliament.org will be achieved electronically. Selected successful cases would be compiled into printed volumes for volumes.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an ultrasound preview of the eParliament.org and how its practical applications to users could make it viable and more attractive. It also discussed how it differs in scope and reach from the projects that sound similar but have limited scopes. This pioneering operational model of democracy has been under development with the technical inputs from volunteers since September, 2002 at Global Initiatives International Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal. In spite of overwhelming response from the public and press, the model is yet to be launched officially due to financial constraints. However, the time is ripe to launch a pilot project in Nepal as originally conceptualized. Once launched, eParliament.org would serve as an ideal and practical mid-way to global democracy, currently unachievable through the United Nations system and the proposed World Parliament, allegedly “utopian and anti-capitalist!”

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