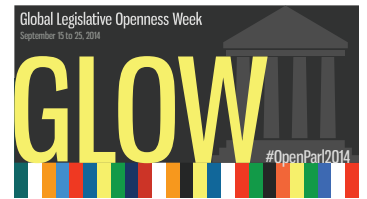




SUNLIGHT  
FOUNDATION

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*<sup>1</sup>, a call to parliaments for an increased commitment to openness, endorsed by more than 150 of the world's leading parliamentary monitoring organizations<sup>2</sup> and a number of international associations of parliaments and MPs<sup>3</sup>.

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.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Week<sup>5</sup>, 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](http://openingparliament.org/contact).

Sincerely,

*The global civil society community*

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

**Albania**

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*MJAFT! Movement*

**Argentina**

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*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**

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*OpenAustralia Foundation*

**Austria**

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*Forum Informationsfreiheit*

**Bangladesh**

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*Transparency International Bangladesh*

**Belgium**

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*WeCitizens*

**Bolivia**

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*Bolivia Transparente*

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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

**Burkina Faso**

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*Open Knowledge Burkina Faso*

**Cameroon**

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*AfroLeadership*

**Canada**

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*OpenNorth*

**Chile**

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*Chile Transparente*  
*Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente*

**Colombia**

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*Congreso Visible*  
*Instituto de Ciencia Política*  
*Transparencia por Colombia*

**Croatia**

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*Code for Croatia*  
*GONG*  
*Otvoreni Zagreb (Open Zagreb)*

**Democratic Republic of Congo**

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

**Ecuador**

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*Observatorio Legislativo*

**El Salvador**

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*The Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development*

**European Union**

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*OpenForum Europe*  
*Parlorama*  
*Parltrack*

**Finland**

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*Open Knowledge Finland*

**France**

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*Regards Citoyens*  
*République Citoyenne*

**Germany**

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*Open Knowledge Germany*  
*OpenGovLD project*

**Greece**

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*Vouliwatch*

**Georgia**

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*JumpStart Georgia*  
*Transparency International Georgia*

**Guatemala**

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*Acción Ciudadana*  
*Congreso Transparente*

**Hungary**

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*K-Monitor*

**India**

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*Center for Legislative Research and Advocacy (CLRA)*

**Indonesia**

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*PATTIRO*

**Israel**

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*Hasadna*

**Italy**

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*Depp.it*

**Jordan**

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

**Kenya**

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*Mzalendo*  
*Open Institute*

**Kosovo**

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*Instituti Kosovar për Kërkime dhe Zhvillime të Politikave (KIPRED)*

**Kyrgyzstan**

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*Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society*

**Liberia**

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*Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD)*  
*Naymote*

**Mexico**

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*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*

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**Montenegro**

*Centar za demokratsku tranziciju (CDT)*

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**Multi-national**

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

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**Netherlands**

*Open State Foundation*

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**Nigeria**

*Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)*

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**Norway**

*Holder de ord*

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**Pakistan**

*Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT)*

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**Paraguay**

*Semillas para la democracia*

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**Peru**

*Asociación Civil Transparencia*  
*Reflexión Democrática*

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**Poland**

*Association 61*  
*ePaństwo Foundation*

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**Romania**

*Institute for Public Policy*

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**Serbia**

*Sajt Centra za istraživanje, transparentnost i odgovornost (CRTA)*

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**South Africa**

*Parliamentary Monitoring Group*

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**South Korea**

*Team POPONG*

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**Spain**

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

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**Tunisia**

*Al Bawsala*

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**Uganda**

*Media Initiative for Open Governance in Uganda*

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**United Kingdom**

*Open Knowledge*  
*Request Initiative*

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**Uruguay**

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

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**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*

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**Venezuela**

*Transparencia Venezuela*