As part of a series of Parliamentary Forums organised by UNESCO within the framework of the follow-up to the International Conference on “Science and Technology Policy: the Parliamentary Perspective” held in Helsinki, Finland, in January 2003, and aimed at better governance of science and technology systems by promoting dialogue between government decision-makers, parliamentarians, scientists and stakeholders, the Special Session on “Investing in Science, Technology and Innovation: Challenges and Opportunities for Parliaments” was held in Budapest, Hungary, on 9 November in the context of the World Science Forum-Budapest. The meeting was attended by representatives of S&T Parliamentary Committees of all regions of the world, scientists and journalists.

The session addressed the following topics: the new political role Parliaments can play to strengthen their capacity to ensure a comprehensive approach to S&T budget process; national parliamentary experiences in relation with setting priorities in budgeting science and technology; the relations between setting priorities for budgeting for science and technology; the relations between science and technology committees and other committees dealing with science and technology in the budgetary process, and how Parliaments can deal with the need of increasing investment in science.

Following the presentations and discussion addressing the above themes, the participants:

- Recognized that there is a direct relationship between S&T investments and economic and social development in terms of increased length and quality of life, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

- Underlined that the budget, as a major social policy document, is more than a financial document.

- Highlighted the responsibility the parliamentarians have in determining the degree of overall priorities given to S&T particularly in countries facing competing budget priorities.

- Acknowledged that in the context of new form of governance, many stakeholders take part in setting budgetary policy besides parliament (educational and scientific institutions, private sector, civil society and media).

- Appreciated that parliament and its S&T committee has a key opportunity for increasing investments in science as financial resources are allocated through legislative instruments.

- Observed that there is a need to bridge the knowledge gaps between Parliamentarians and scientists as a means to support sustainable solutions for the problems of humankind, UNESCO was called upon to facilitate this proposal.

- Urged UNESCO to take the responsibility for a worldwide research programme as a global issue, which is important for peace and a sustainable common future. The
local priorities should be: resource allocation, global public good, conflict research and research into multiculturalism.

- Additionally urged UNESC9 to be the entity for building capacity in Technology Assessment objectives to guarantee that members of parliaments and civil society in each part of the world have access to the scientific knowledge about the impact (the possible benefits + the harmful consequences) of technologies.

- Hailed UNESCO for providing the opportunity for the dialogue of parliamentarians to enable them share experiences amongst themselves. It was observed that most times scientists and civil servants have the chance to interact with each other. UNESCO should be encouraged to help initiate or improve dialogue between scientists and parliamentarians.