

# *Lawmakers Discuss Internet and Communication Strategies*

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Havana, July 15 (RHC) -- As part of the agenda of the Cuban Parliament's permanent commissions prior to the plenary session Wednesday of the legislative body, lawmakers were briefed about the policy and strategies of the island's communications program and its prospects.

At present, the Communications Ministry is working not only to expand Internet services but also to improve its offer to the people, according to the report presented at the session.

Communications Minister Maimir Mesa said that the principles ruling the communications policy in Cuban society prioritize the political defense and cyber-security in the face of threats, attacks and risks of all kinds and that the development of Internet and communications will advance as conditions are created to counter such attacks.

Along with this, a study prior to the parliamentary meeting revealed that over 70 percent of the Information Technology equipment in Cuba is outdated, particularly computers.

As part of the strategy, the country expects to expand e-commerce including a proposal for the people to be able to pay bills from their own computers and not only at ATMs. "We are preparing to begin the payment of telephone bills on-line, because there are still large lines of people at commercial offices," said first deputy Communications minister Wilfredo Gonzalez.

Along with the expansion of Internet services, the local infrastructure including Web navigation rooms, must be improved. At present, along with those rooms, there are some 114 cyber-clubs offering Internet access 10 hours a day.

Since July 1st, the Telecom company ETECSA expanded its WiFi service to 35 public areas throughout the country, but the price, although lower now than before, continues to spark concern since 2 pesos (similar to 2 dollars) per hour is still out of the reach of the majority of the people.

The Communications officials explain that there is an ongoing program to provide professionals from prioritized areas with internet service at their homes, and this includes education, culture, health and the media.

An upgrade of the cellphone infrastructure is already in the works, particularly in Havana, aimed at improving the access of mobile phones to the Internet with fastest speed and higher quality.

The deputies inquired about the announced expansion of Internet services to Cuban homes. In this regard, the Communications Minister said that the process will take place progressively by using not only conventional technology, but also WiFi services according to technological possibilities.

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