

## **OFFICIAL LAUNCH ADDRESS**

### **LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION (AUC) POLITICAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT AND INTERNATIONAL IDEA JOINT ACTIVITY PLAN**

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Mr. Vidar Helgesen, Secretary General International IDEA  
Excellencies, Ambassadors of AU Member States  
Excellencies, Ambassadors of Partner Embassies and Missions in Addis Ababa  
Dr Abdalla Hamdok, Regional Director, Africa and the Middle East Programme,  
International IDEA  
Distinguished Representatives of Partner Organisations, International  
Governmental Organisations and Civil Society Organizations  
Ladies and Gentleman

It is indeed an immense pleasure and honour to be with you today and to further welcome you all to the official launch of the African Union Commission (AUC) and International IDEA Joint Activity Plan. This event is an important milestone in a journey that has its operational roots in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two organizations in Accra, Ghana on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007 and subsequent engagements between our officials.

Whilst our partnership has specific operational roots, the foundation of our work is the democracy and governance journey that we are all embarking on. Democracy and governance, as you are aware, are not static; they are evolving in many different ways across the globe. The process of democratization is always a 'work in progress' since no society can legitimately claim to be fully democratized. Even in matters, such as 'elections management' there have been notable lapses in older democracies and many continue to struggle with ensuring substantive representation within their political and economic systems. Whilst our partnership is focused on Africa, the journey that we are intervening in is one that is being embarked on across the globe. We cannot and should not, as we make progress, forget that what we are doing has global significance and will ultimately contribute to the evolution of democratic practice in a wider context.

The location of our work in Africa encourages us to look at the elements in the African context that make the journey different to the democracy and governance paths in other parts of the world. Different regions of the world have taken different paths to democracy and development. For some, economic development stretched over several centuries before democracy was installed. For others, economic development was often accompanied by authoritarianism

which gradually conceded to democratisation only in the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The countries which developed the economic base first, before the pressures for democratisation began in earnest, include most democracies in the West. Many of the East Asian countries vigorously pursued economic growth while putting a lid on demands for democracy during the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Excellencies

Distinguished Representatives

At independence, newly independent African states needed to respond to demands for both democratisation as well as for economic growth. As such, there would be no trade-off between these simultaneous demands, nor would the countries have decades in which to conveniently sequence the expectations of citizens for democracy and economic development. Africa is expected to leapfrog stages of economic and political development which took several centuries to build in other regions. We have in the shortness of time and within the ambits of our own humility, come to realise that the arguments for a hierarchy of priorities that would put economic growth first before attending to democracy and vice versa, are flawed. It is, therefore, evident and indisputable that economic development and democratisation must and do indeed go together.

Unlike the West and the East, Africa does not have the historical convenience of choosing how to sequence its democratisation and development processes. The internal demands for material development, freedom and participation continue to rise whilst the external demands of globalisation exert enormous pressures on national economies and cultures. I am sure that you will join me in appreciating that the challenges we face are unlike those in other regions and do call on us to be creative and innovative in the interventions we establish and the solutions we craft in addressing the twin challenges of development and democracy that confront us. Without democratisation, development will not be sustainable. At the same time, without progress in human development and economic growth, democratisation will rest on a fragile foundation. The path towards simultaneous development and democratisation is therefore to integrate both processes into one by making development itself a process of democratisation.

This path of simultaneous political and economic development requires that democratisation and governance not be limited to multiparty elections. To ensure effective participation, democratisation must address the social and economic vulnerabilities of ordinary people, such as poverty and inequality. By all indications, these vulnerabilities can only be addressed by social transformation and by massive social, cultural and economic upliftment of the poor in Africa. Without this, there is no democracy. We cannot solve the democracy challenge

without addressing in a decisive manner the prevailing shortcomings in economic development in the context of the global economic system. In recognising this, we also need to admit the reality that there is no other way to stem authoritarianism and achieve economic and social coherence without a minimum of political legitimacy and democracy.

The realities of democratisation in Africa and indeed across the world make us realise that democracy is not an event, but a process and a long-term one at that. As we intervene and embark on this path, we will indeed face many challenges and we will learn and adapt as we move on. Recent experiences in Kenya and current developments in Zimbabwe do indeed point to this reality and the difficult and complex challenges we face. In these instances, we have faced, in a very direct way, the reality that conventional multiparty elections have the potential of creating deeper conflict and violence than had been anticipated by any of us. In responding to these challenges we are forced to think and act in ways that move us beyond the crafting of static and conventional solutions to the democracy and governance challenge.

With advances in our journey, we are obliged to recognise that democracy in Africa has taken on many different forms and shades. Within this diversity, what is becoming increasingly apparent is that the democratic aspirations of African peoples are firmly established and the involvement of civil society in national and local issues is becoming an integral part of Africa's political landscape. Today, more Africans live under democratic rule than ever before. The number of successful democratic transitions is indeed testimony to the path that has been firmly established. However, we must recognise that in many instances the institutions and processes meant to sustain the democratic path established are weak and often very poorly resourced. Hence, the failure on our part to intervene, strengthen and consolidate the initial work done, could contribute towards the possibility of back-sliding into the authoritarianism and declining development that none of us wants.

In embarking on and intervening in the democracy and governance journey, we are indeed seeking to fulfil a collective obligation to create the possibility for a developed and prosperous Africa whose citizens are empowered with the ability to pursue lives of quality and meaning. For many of our African people, as I have said on many occasions, the struggle for a time when they have the space and the ability to truly exercise their rights as citizens, without fear of reprisal and in the full confidence that the social contract between citizens and elected leadership will be honoured, came with great sacrifice. For the African Union Commission, the struggles and the sacrifices made therein serve to further affirm our resolve to ensure that the gains that have been made are secured and in fact, deepened. They also fortify our determination to continue to speak out and call on our Member States to take collective action against those leaders who

refuse to respect the principles upon which transparency, good governance and the rule of law are based.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is in this context that I cannot but express my pleasure as I remind this meeting of the significant accomplishments we can already point to on this journey. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007 at the 8<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Member States of the African Union, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance was adopted. The adoption of the Charter not only marked a wider recognition of the significance of the Charter for Africa. It also signified the readiness of African Member States to move beyond symbolic commitments to the difficult and sober task of taking forward the Charter towards ratification and finally, implementation.

We are all conscious of the historical challenges which have informed the adoption of the Charter. Let me remind all of us that the adoption of the Charter emanated from a long standing concern with unconstitutional changes of government and the resulting insecurity, instability and violent conflict which has characterized the African experience. The fact that it has now been adopted, serves to demonstrate the determination of the African Union, and indeed, its Member States to promote and strengthen good governance through institutionalizing transparency, accountability and participatory democracy. Since its adoption, the Charter has received substantive focus and enthusiasm across Africa. It now stands as the foremost instrument in enhancing the overall state of democracy, elections and governance across Africa.

The adoption of the Charter is for us, a very significant step forward in consolidating and sustaining the democratic momentum. The next step, as I have suggested, is to ensure that we continue to strengthen this process through practical interventions to support the institutions and processes of democracy and governance. In establishing and launching today, the Joint Activity Plan, we are indeed responding in a very practical way to the challenge and demonstrating to all that we are moving beyond dialogue into implementation and action.

For many in our beloved Continent, the value of the process we put into place to popularize and build a momentum for the ratification and implementation of the Charter, resides in tangible results. If individuals, families, communities and our institutions do not experience the benefits of our collective engagements and choices we make, their confidence and willingness to invest in endeavours to build more effective democracies will certainly decline. I am confident that we all agree that we cannot afford to erode the faith our people have in our leadership and humble wisdom. We therefore, have no other alternative but to ensure that

we establish credible actions and most importantly, embark on their implementation.

In launching the Joint Action Plan, both the AUC and International IDEA are demonstrating and putting before all that, we have indeed applied ourselves to the challenges we face and will continue on the path towards success. We are also placing a challenge before all to join us in this journey and work with us in implementing our plans and the solutions we are crafting in terms of our unique African context and experience. The international community and partners cannot stand aside and be passive observers in this journey. We are all obliged to play a facilitative and practical role in an established journey. The international community and indeed our partners within the AUC have a vital role to play and can make essential contributions to the democratisation and governance processes. Talk of partnerships cannot be confined to encouraging African ownership or the promotion of donor interpretations of what needs to be done, it must, we insist, be about assisting us in asserting our own policy visions and home grown approaches to the complexities of democracy and governance.

By putting before you the Joint Action Plan, we are indeed calling on you, in a very direct way, to support us in this very practical journey. We are indeed grateful to those who have come to this process through very direct and tangible contributions. I am sure that many of you will join, amongst others, the Canadians, Australians and Germans, who have already made very direct pledges to support our efforts. Through the contributions, our partners are indeed recognising that we have no option but to continue to build our capacity to do the work that we are all committed to.

In launching the Joint Activity Plan, we are also celebrating a relationship that has been forged overtime. A relationship that is built upon respect for each other's capacities, on a mutual understanding of the challenges we face and on an understanding of the interventions that would be optimal in the current conjuncture. Naturally, there is always room to do more and expand the breath of our activities. We must however all recognise that, as with the democratic process, building capacity and achieving results takes time and requires that we exercise patience and perseverance. This is a long journey, one which will move us beyond the initial five year period we have set for ourselves. We must and have to stay together for the years to come and indeed commit ourselves to the long-term. As we do this, we also have to be mindful of the fact that we must always remain accountable, transparent and democratic in our own actions and that we need to demonstrate constantly the value the partnerships bring to the democracy journey and the modest gains that are being made as a result of our partnership.

You will recognise, from the details to be presented later, that as the AUC and International IDEA, we have applied our minds on those activities that would be most relevant and possible, as we start this collective effort. During this process, we were mindful that we will confront challenges and that, as with any relationship, we would need to constantly work at adapting to each other's approaches and methodologies. We are all nevertheless very committed and conscious of the fact that we will succeed. Our initial collective efforts have moved us to a point where we can talk of a 'oneness' in vision and resolve, between IDEA and the AUC. I am sure that over the years, our partnership and joint activities will stand as an example of what can be done when we work together in a context that is complex and dynamic.

In concluding Your Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my great honour and immense satisfaction to formally launch the Joint Activity Plan between the AUC and International IDEA. I am sure that you will all join me to congratulate all of those involved in the elaboration of the details in the Action Plan for their efforts and encourage all of us to remain focused on the democracy and governance vision we have established for ourselves.

I thank you.