



## **CONFERENCE STATEMENT**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
SUSTAINING AFRICA'S DEMOCRATIC MOMENTUM  
05 - 07 March 2007  
Johannesburg, South Africa**

Whereas the African Union Commission, the Electoral Commission of South Africa and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance convened the International Conference on Sustaining Africa's Democratic Momentum in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2007.

Whereas it was agreed that the key objectives of the conference would be:

- to discuss the global challenges facing democracy and electoral processes, the specific challenges facing Africa, and to identify lessons which can be learned from both old and new democracies in an effort to leverage effective solutions to these democratic challenges, especially in emerging democracies;
- to give impetus to ongoing efforts on the African continent, especially those spearheaded by the AU, to foster increased commitment among the AU member states to democracy, elections, and governance through instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM);
- to provide an opportunity for Africa to showcase its success stories in the institutionalisation of democracy and elections - especially in post-conflict contexts - and also for Africa to learn from the experiences of other countries and regions in promoting democracy and electoral processes;
- to interrogate the relevance and viability of the methods, strategies, and approaches to build and strengthen Africa's democratic experiment; and
- to explore opportunities for strengthening South-South cooperation to build strong democracies and electoral processes and to facilitate the sharing of experiences and the forging of regional relationships.

Whereas over 320 delegates, including former African Heads of State and Government; continental, regional and national policy makers; electoral management bodies, political parties, and members of academia and civil society from Africa, Latin America and Asia; and development partners attended the conference.

Appreciating the keynote address by Her Excellency Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Deputy President of South Africa, and her assertion that the ideal of democracy in Africa was “old news...the new story is the quality of democracy.”

Acknowledging the challenge to make democracy meaningful to the ordinary person and to deepen the quality of Africa’s democracy through, inter alia, embracing cultural diversity, creating transparent and tangible processes and furthering gender representivity to improve the quality of life for all Africa’s people.

Recognising that this is the first time a conference of this nature has been convened in Africa within the framework of South-South cooperation.

Appreciating the opening of the conference by His Excellency Professor Alpha Oumar Konare, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, a conference he described as “one step in the long walk to develop democracy on the continent.”

Acknowledging Africa’s commitment to democracy as demonstrated by the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the critical need for this and other key AU Charters to be ratified and implemented as a matter of priority.

Recognising the role democracy can play in breaking down boundaries and in embracing cultural diversity.

Acknowledging the requirement for peace and security in Africa if democracy is to flourish.

Acknowledging the view of Mr Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General International IDEA, that democracy, though it entails principles that must not be compromised, “needs to be applied in the national and cultural context, taking into account the historic, cultural, political and legal traditions of each country.”

Recognising that sustainable democracy is a long-term undertaking which cannot be reduced to event-driven efforts and quick fixes.

Appreciating the opening remarks by Dr Brigalia Bam, Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of South Africa, of the need to give more voice to the unrepresented, to address the gender gap, improve transparency and limit the role of money in elections.

Confirming that, in Africa, democratic reform is dependant on the history and circumstances of the country as “democracy that empowers people must be built and can not be imported.”

Cognisant of the home-grown initiatives undertaken by the African Union, in particular the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in January 2007, and regional institutions to consolidate peace, security, stability, growth and development in Africa, all of which have helped position elections, democracy, good governance and constitutionalism as cornerstones for the success of democratic ideals.

Congratulating Ghana on the celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of independence.

Recognising the above processes must be initiated and driven by Africans on a regional, national and continental level, but that these efforts can benefit from international support.

Noting with concern the situation in the Sudan and the efforts of all role-players to facilitate a peaceful and lasting solution.

The International Conference on Sustaining Africa's Democratic Momentum hereby recognizes the following conclusions and outcomes from our deliberations:

### **Electoral Systems**

1. Reaffirming that the type of electoral system adopted in a country plays an important role in fostering democracy.
2. In post-conflict societies the choice of electoral systems is crucial to the success of conflict management processes and must be chosen to support the goals of inclusivity, representivity and reconciliation.
3. There should be ongoing review of electoral systems to ensure they are still relevant to the needs of democracy building in the country
4. Electoral review processes should use a participatory approach that ensures the informed participation of the citizens.
5. The choice of electoral system must ensure gender parity in representation in political institutions.

### **Political Parties**

1. Reaffirming political pluralism is integral in a multiparty democracy.
2. Political parties play an indispensable role in democracy and must be strengthened to be responsible, internally democratic, and accountable.
3. Political parties must remove the barriers preventing the full and active participation of women within the party structure including in decision making processes.
4. Political Parties must put in place measures that ensure the gender parity of nominations for elected office.
5. The crisis of trust in political parties needs to be reversed by ensuring accountability and transparency.
6. There must be increased transparency in the funding of political parties as well as accountability for the use of public funds.

7. Opposition parties play a fundamental role in democratic governance and this role needs to be understood.
8. There is a need to strengthen political parties by establishing a forum for political parties in Africa.

### **Constitutional Frameworks**

1. Recognising that participatory, inclusive constitutional processes can be important mechanisms for providing peace and managing conflict and diversity in society.
2. The full participation of citizens in the design and formulation of constitutional frameworks should be ensured.
3. Changes to the constitution should not be made against the spirit of the constitution and the universal democratic values.
4. Review of the constitution must occur in order to ensure relevance and legitimacy and to continually address fundamental issues such as inclusivity, gender equality, justice and the even distribution of resources.
5. There needs to be measures in place to ensure that constitutional review processes are not manipulated. These measures should include broad and inclusive participatory processes as well as impartial constitutional justice.

### **External support to Democratisation and Election Processes**

1. Recognising that democracy is an indigenous process and can never be imposed from outside.
2. Democracy support and electoral assistance should be effective and sustainable and must move beyond short term event driven support towards long-term process support.
3. Comparative experiences can provide added value to democratisation processes and in this context the value of South-South exchange should be nurtured.
4. External actors can play an important role in supporting indigenous democracy-building processes provided they recognise the priority needs as defined by the recipient.
5. Capacity-building and skills development is fundamental to effective and sustainable democratisation support.
6. Endorse and strongly support the commitment of the African Union to establish the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit and the Electoral Assistance Fund as an important development towards enhancing electoral processes and democracy on the continent.

### **Democracy and Development**

1. Recognising one of the great challenges for democracy is to deliver economic and social justice and development.
2. Democracy and development must go hand in hand to improve the quality of life of citizens.

3. Social and economic policies and programmes must be designed and implemented to promote sustainable development and meaningful democracy.
4. Democratic systems are more likely to be responsive and better at fighting corruption and thus promoting conditions necessary for development.
5. Economic growth should translate into reducing inequality and eradication of poverty to ensure social and economic justice for all, including women and other marginalised groups.

### **Election Management Bodies**

1. Independent and impartial election management bodies must be established and strengthened.
2. Electoral management bodies should subscribe to key norms and principles to guide their work including upholding the electoral law, professionalism, impartiality, integrity, transparency, accuracy and service mindedness.
3. Electoral management bodies must invest in developing the capacity and skills of their staff to ensure their professional development.
4. Permanent capacity and structures must be created to ensure continuity and retain knowledge and skills for sustainable electoral processes.
5. The establishment and appointment of election management bodies must engender public trust and confidence.
6. Election management bodies must strive towards affordable and cost efficient running of elections.
7. States must ensure adequate and legitimate funding is available for the effective functioning of election management bodies.
8. Election management bodies must eliminate the barriers that exist that exclude women and promote gender representivity at all levels in the election management body including in decision making positions.
9. Disadvantaged and marginalised groups should also be equitably represented at all levels in the election management body including in decision making positions.
10. Election management bodies should foster cooperation, sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices at both regional and international level, including South-South dialogues.

### **Civil Society**

1. Civil society organisations present at this conference should form a network in order to further strive for opportunities for collaboration, strengthening capacities and experience sharing within the collective effort of deepening democratic processes.
2. Civil society organisations must ‘go back to basics’ by re-affirming the values of integrity, collective action, solidarity and building a collective conscience to fight against ignorance and all forms of exclusion.
3. Government must reflect that it takes the role of civil society seriously and commit to ensuring that civil society is effective in performing its function.

4. Efforts must be made to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations, especially in terms of their analytical, lobbying and advocacy roles.

### **Indigenous Institutions and processes**

1. More research needs to be undertaken to identify synergies between indigenous practises and values and alignment with the modern institutions of democracy.
2. Means of creating meaningful consultation between indigenous institutions and the modern institutions of democracy should be explored to ensure their compatibility with the universal principles and values of democracy.
3. Where appropriate, indigenous institutions should be utilised in the development of communities.

### **Direct Democracy**

1. Where appropriate, referenda, citizen initiatives and recall mechanisms can enable citizens to participate directly in decision making and should be considered and used as useful democratic design mechanisms.
2. Indigenous consultation mechanisms are forms of direct democracy and should be embraced to enhance citizen participation in democratisation processes.

### **Members of the Forum of Former Heads of State and Government**

1. Former elected Heads of State and Government can play an important role in supporting democratisation processes on the continent and States are encouraged to set up mechanisms in order to facilitate such roles.

Wherefore the Conference calls upon all participants and organisation to bring the recommendations and outcomes of this conference to the attention of the respective Heads of State and Government as well as the principals of the represented organisations and bodies.