



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS



**International Round Table on
DEMOCRACY FOR DEVELOPMENT - DEVELOPMENT FOR DEMOCRACY**

12 September 2008

**The New York Helmsley Hotel
212 East 42nd Street (between 2nd and 3rd Avenue**

1. The Event

On the occasion of the first-ever International Day of Democracy, established in 2007 by the UN General Assembly, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of the United Nations will co-organise in New York a one day Round Table on the inter-play between democracy and development.

2. Objective

The meeting will seek to identify areas of policy for multilateral action in the current global context – especially by the UN – in the field of democracy promotion and support that would enhance sustainable development processes.

Key recommendations from the meeting will be conveyed to the special informal plenary of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly that will be held on 15 September on the occasion of the First International Democracy Day.

The meeting may provide forward-looking ideas for the debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the forthcoming UN High Level Mid-Term Review, scheduled to take place in September in New York in connection with the 63rd Session of the General Assembly. The discussions may also provide inputs for the follow up to the recent ECOSOC Development Cooperation Forum, especially as regards the role of parliaments, local governments, political parties and civil society, as well as other non-state actors at the national level. The debate should be informed by the results of the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, to be held from 2nd to 4th September, and it may also be relevant for the forthcoming UN Conference on Financing for Development in Doha, 29th November to 2nd December 2008.

3. Participants

The meeting will bring together some ten panellists drawn from experts, scholars and policy makers jointly identified by IDEA, UN DPA, and UNDP and representatives of Permanent Missions to the UN, UN Secretariat, UN specialised agencies, funds and programmes, regional organizations, think tanks and NGOs will also be invited to participate in the event. Every effort will be made to present views from diverse geographic locations, and panellists will also be selected to provide specific policy ideas and recommendations pertinent to the role of the UN system.

4. Rationale

Sustainable Development, as one of the key pillars of the work of the United Nations, is pursued by agencies, funds and programmes throughout the UN system, with key priorities for the international community enshrined in the Millennium Declaration and the associated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In particular, UNDP's specific mandate on human development is associated, in the field of democracy building, with its democratic governance agenda. Development cooperation programmes focus increasingly on improving and strengthening specific aspects of democratic governance, whether they address rule of law issues, human rights, gender equality, inclusive participation, transparency, voice and accountability, effective public service delivery, or more broadly, developing the capacity of institutions to be responsive to people's needs. These actions, in one way or another, deal with promoting the core aspects of democracy, a system in which government is controlled by citizens, all citizens are given the opportunity to participate meaningfully, and are considered as equals in the exercise of that control.

Activities in support of democracy and those in support of development are often perceived as belonging to separate, if not competing or even opposed agendas. They also tend to be seen as essentially technical fields of expertise, removed from the broader realm of making political choices and decisions. However, if development is increasingly understood as "human development", that is expanding choices and opportunities, the sustainability of democracy appears to be highly sensitive to improving the everyday lives of the people. The two areas increasingly converge, not only in citizens' objectives and aspirations, but also in the very practical matter of using resources more effectively. Furthermore, the experience of numerous actors clearly shows that both processes involve much more than technical expertise, policy advice, and higher levels of investment. In order for development results to be genuinely owned by their beneficiaries and for that development to be sustainable, they need to be generated and shaped by an open and inclusive participatory decision-making process that is genuinely democratic.

The twin goals of democracy and development are also being acutely affected in various countries, in the context of current global economic trends. The global rapid rise in commodity prices, including basic food staples and energy sources like petroleum, has reached every corner of the world, affecting millions of people and particularly those already living in poverty. As the capacity of governments to deliver services is directly affected by these shocks, their immediate impact has the potential to destabilize democracies at a time when it is essential that governments that are accountable and politically motivated to respond to inequalities are sustained. At the same time, the strain of higher commodity prices for poorer, importing nations threatens to undermine efforts at further social and economic development and in reaching key MDG goals.

The International Day of Democracy 2008 is an opportunity to further identify the key areas of policy that need to be addressed when considering the interactions between the development and democracy agendas in the current global context, with a view to making them more mutually reinforcing, and to consider the challenges and potential for multilateral action, and in particular by the United Nations, in that perspective.