



Address by International IDEA Secretary-General, Vidar Helgesen
African Union – Organization of American States Forum
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Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping

Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza

Chair of the African Union Permanent Representatives Committee,

Chair of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States

Permanent Representatives

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for International IDEA to participate in this Forum which addresses challenges and opportunities for democracy and human rights in Africa and the Americas. As the only intergovernmental organization with a sole mandate to support sustainable democracy, we are proud to draw half of our member states from these two regions, and to work closely with their two regional organisations.

I want to congratulate the African Union and the Organization of American States on having organized this event. It provides a unique opportunity, not only to examine the challenges to democracy in Africa and Americas, but to jointly explore how the AU and OAS can collaborate in addressing these challenges. This spirit of sharing experiences and learning together is right at the heart of what International IDEA stands for as an organization.

Globally, the African Union and Organization of American States are the most active regional organizations in the field of democracy. Both organizations have democracy charters, which are the express mandates of your Member States to work on democracy building.

This is indeed a year for democracy building, not least in the African continent. The people-driven movements in North Africa have demanded political reform and democracy. They have demonstrated that democracy is a universal value shared by people all over the world. They have also shown that democratic change can be brought about by citizens who mobilize peacefully with the aim of greater equality, access to opportunity and political rights. But they are also faced with the challenge of resistance to change from actors who benefited from former regimes.

Elsewhere, African countries have made firm and substantial progress towards democracy. Many African Union countries have consolidated your democracies, others are in the process of doing so. I would like to congratulate in particular Zambia - which has just elected a new President in a peaceful transition of power - and Cape Verde, whose former President has just been awarded the Mo Ibrahim Prize for good governance.

The establishment of the African Union itself was a positive step towards building collective responsibility in Africa for economic and political governance. The African Peer Review Mechanism also demonstrates the effort to mobilize collective political will of African leaders and their commitment to mutual accountability. The concept of 'African Shared Values' underpins collective values such as good governance, democracy, respect for human rights and gender equality. These values also underpin International IDEA's partnership with the African Union's on the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which aim to build democratic capacity throughout Africa. It needs to be said, however, that political will is required to bring the number of

ratifications of this Charter to the required level in order to make it a binding instrument.

For the Organization of American States, it is now ten years since the signature of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. I had the personal pleasure of celebrating this anniversary with you in Chile only last month. Almost all countries in the Americas now have democratically elected governments and the region has witnessed significant progress in the area of human rights and the consolidation of transparent and fair electoral systems. The OAS has been a world leader in regional collaboration on democracy and International IDEA has been honored to partner with you in your work on the development and strengthening of democratic institutions, as well as improving gender equality in political participation and representation.

Representatives here present from the OAS and AU are yourselves best placed to identify which challenges face the consolidation of democracy in your own regions. It seems clear, however, that many of the challenges you face are common ones - the need to protect the integrity of electoral processes; to promote inclusion in political participation and democratic decision-making, in particular of women; to address the problems caused by incumbency, economic and social inequality and corruption.

The legacy of conflict and the need for conflict prevention mechanisms, are major challenges to building sustainable democracy and I look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations on these issues later during this Forum. The intersection between conflict and democracy is particular relevance to International IDEA's own work as we are developing global tools to help predict and manage violence around elections. IDEA is also in the process of

establishing a presence on the ground in post-conflict countries such as Haiti and South Sudan.

At the intersection of the themes of this Forum – electoral practices, conflict and security, human rights – lies one issue which, although not specifically on the agenda for this Forum, may be one of the most serious challenges to democratic politics in both the Americas and Africa today – the penetration of politics by organized crime.

As many of you are aware, transnational organized crime has risen to become a major threat to both emerging and established democracies. These networks exist across Africa and the Americas, in democracies such as Colombia and Ghana, as well as in countries which are fragile, such as Haiti, and in relatively new democracies such as Liberia. This is not a problem confined to Africa and the Americas alone. In Europe, transnational crime networks exist in post-communist countries which are now members of the EU - Estonia, Latvia and Romania - as well as in long-established European democracies, such as Italy.

This global persistence of transnational criminal networks poses a great threat to democracy. The illicit financing of political campaigns is obviously a major concern. However, it is only the tip of the iceberg of more complex linkages between the political sphere and the darker side of globalization. Criminal networks are altering electoral behaviour through the intimidation of voters. They are establishing legitimate political parties. They distort governance, security and financial architectures through money laundering, violence and illicit trade in drugs, people and weapons.

These challenges require an urgent revision of policies and legal frameworks at national level. They also highlight the need for the international community to

work together in new ways to safeguard the legitimacy of political processes and allow democracy the space to grow.

This Forum gives an exemplary model of how regional organizations can contribute to addressing common challenges to democracy, by sharing experiences and exploring the potential for collaboration in finding solutions . Your insights are valuable to other regions which are now slowly starting to work in the field of democracy. Your cooperation serves as a solid foundation from which other regions can learn.

International IDEA took an initiative in 2010 to build a forum for inter-regional dialogue on democracy which brings together regional organizations from all over the world to share such experiences and insights on democracy. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation for the commitment of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, and the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, to this dialogue since its inception. In continuation of this initiative, International IDEA looks forward to the hosting by the African Union of an inter-regional workshop on the integrity of elections in December this year. We also look forward to the presence of the AU and OAS at the second high-level meeting of the Inter-Regional Dialogue, to be hosted by ASEAN in Jakarta in 2012.

There is a saying that ‘a burden shared is a burden halved’ and I think that this captures well what can be achieved from a Forum such as this. Through discussing common challenges to democracy in Africa and the Americas, one can find ways of collaborating in addressing these challenges which would not be possible through acting alone. I wish you every success in cementing your collaboration and pledge our continued partnership in this endeavor.

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