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**International IDEA, Strömsborg, 103 34 Stockholm, Sweden**  
**Phone +46-8-698 37 00, Fax: +46-8-20 24 22**  
**E-mail: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int) Web: [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)**

**International Seminar**  
**“Democracy Building in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings”**  
**Stockholm, March 4, 2008**  
**Speaking notes for the SG:**

The intense period of political change across the globe since the end of the Cold War and in conjunction with the post-September 11 environment has brought new challenges and demands to our understanding of what it means to engage in democracy building in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Peace building initiatives, peace keeping operations and reconstruction efforts are today far more complex and sophisticated not only due to the deep changes in the political landscape but also due to an increased awareness within the international community of the high costs and long term implications that failures bring about.

Such awareness is paired with the availability of new information and analytical tools as well as the emergence of new international and regional initiatives to address the interaction between drivers of peace and conflict.

What we are seeking today in this seminar is not the formulation of new recommendations or guidelines, but rather, context-based reflections that will allow policy makers within the donor community to think through the most problematic issues faced in the field while designing more effective and responsible assistance.

Today's messages from the field are contradictory and not easy to interpret: on the positive side, we are told that the number of conflicts has decreased since the nineties. What sets a shadow on these indicators is that human security and human development indicators have continued to decrease in a large number of countries.

We have seen that some essential processes of democracy-building may go wrong and degenerate in violence. Thus, Kenya, considered to be an example of regional stability, has recently experienced devastating outbursts of violence triggered by elections – an institution at the very core of democracy.

In Bolivia, the political process intended to bring about a new constitution – another key building block of democracy – seems to have further exasperated social and ethnic divides bringing the country to the edge of civil violence

In Nepal, the parallel processes of peace-building and democracy-building, while raising great hopes, continue to render each other delicate and fragile.

The world is probably not a more dangerous place today than it was ten years ago. Yet, in many places important root causes of violent conflict are still alive and well.

For all of us engaged in democracy building in conflict and post-conflict settings two broad challenges seem to be emerging: How to strike the right balance between the sometimes competing imperatives of peace-making and democracy-building? And second, how to ensure the effectiveness of democracy-building efforts?

As to the first challenge, its very assertion may sound contradictory: are stability and democracy not complementary and supportive of each other? Yes, definitely, they are, in as much as they tend to converge and ultimately to meet in the reality we can easily observe: where democracy is solidly implanted, peace seems to be so as well. However, the building of the two does not follow the same path and in the short run differences are significant: actors are not the same; methodologies differ, as does timing.

As for Actors: By necessity, peace is made, at least at the beginning, among those principally responsible for the conflict; democracy-building needs to empower citizens and to disempower the warlords;

As for Methodologies: making peace will often require power-sharing; when group grievances are the overwhelming social feature, power sharing may need to be built into the system and to stay there for a longer period. However, it may also freeze social mobility and hamper the emergence of citizens as protagonists of democracy.

As for time-frames: they are obviously different. Making peace is urgent by definition. Democracy building is a long-term process by definition. The problem is

not purely theoretical and has very practical implications on the ground as the establishment of democratic institutions is becoming a regular item on most peace-building agendas.

As evidenced in the DRC, preparing free and fair elections where no elections were held for decades takes time. As evidenced in East Timor, Afghanistan and other countries emerging from conflict, ensuring the legitimacy of the constitution is not an easy process either, not to speak about the reform of the justice and security sectors. Interim arrangements as in Nepal are often the only way to reconcile the urgency of peace making and the time necessary for democracy-building. Interim arrangements may be a learning process for political parties and other actors of democracy, an opportunity for new leaders to learn about dialogue, trade-offs, building support by political means. Rebel leaders need to learn politics. Mainstream politicians need to learn how to live with former guerrilla leaders etc.

The second challenge – how to ensure the effectiveness of democracy-building efforts, particularly in post conflict transitional settings - is one of International IDEA's priority concerns. Our efforts are directed towards providing methodological tools, facilitating policy development and supporting concrete democratic reforms in Latin America, Africa and Asia-Pacific, and increasingly in the Middle East.

A recent IDEA study entitled “*Democracy, Conflict and Human Security – Pursuing Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*” allowed us to distil some important findings. They still need to be tested among stakeholders of democracy-building processes – national and international ones – but they do offer important initial guidelines. I would like to highlight those I consider to be the most important:

**First:** the need for **national ownership** and **legitimacy of the international intervention**: In order to provoke positive and sustainable changes in the local reality, international efforts in support of democracy must themselves be legitimate and perceived as such by both the local population and by the international community. Unfortunately, this has become the weakest point of international democracy-building efforts since 9/11. Linkages that have been made between the “war on terror” and the promotion of democracy have prompted a deeply polarised discourse on the

promotion of democracy. Whether we like it or not, the fact is that a significant part of the world's population – and not only in the so-called Greater Middle East - sees international efforts to promote democracy as the imposition of alien interests and ideologies through the use of force. International assistance to democracy needs to reclaim its multilateral credibility and legitimacy, the one it had or seemed to have acquired at the end of the Cold War. In a world that seems has been drifting for several years towards political polarisation rather than integration, this is, of course, easier said than done.

**Second** - the **key importance of context** is self-evident. There is no model or blueprint, solutions need to be tailor-made.

**Third**, the need for a **long term approach**: Democracy is not a locomotive that you can put on tracks and it runs by itself. This **time factor** has much to do with the fact that **processes** in democracy-building are as important as **contents**. A constitution can be picture perfect, modern, secular, with mechanisms for horizontal and vertical accountability well designed and tested in other countries. It will not work if it is not truly owned by those who are supposed to implement it. **Building ownership takes time**. It took more than six years to negotiate the post-apartheid constitution of South Africa and eight years to develop the white paper on Defence. Yet, donor countries often want to see quick results in order to reap the benefits with the electorate back home.

**Fourth**, an effective democracy assistance approach is one that **integrates the many facets of democracy, not only in terms of institutional architecture** (elections, constitutions, political party regulation, justice reform etc...) but also in terms of **building national capacity for dialogue and reconciliation**. This is about building **democratic practice** and the **culture** of democracy. IDEA has just launched a comparative study on “*Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict in Africa*” which provides important insights for policy development in post conflict reconstruction, democracy building and development.

**Last but not least** - is the **capacity of democracy to deliver**. Nothing is more conflict inducing than unfulfilled promises. Emerging political leaders in transitional

environments often tend to make unrealistic promises in order to gain new supporters and strengthen their constituencies. Donor support in such cases should have a “sobering” objective before the democratic change (warning against unrealistic promises) and a stronger and well-targeted material support once the democratic government has assumed its functions. This support should not side-line the opposition, rather include it and ensure that the new political configuration of the country is not projected as one of winners and losers. Often what happens is the opposite and the pre-conflict tensions remain unresolved. In such cases deficient political party structures exacerbate conflict and trigger violence hence becoming a threat to democracy itself. In the forthcoming study *“Political Parties in Conflict-Prone Societies: Encouraging Inclusive Politics and Democratic Development”* IDEA probes the challenges for party development to deliver the foundations upon which representative politics depends.

Let me conclude by highlighting that what I have attempted to do today is only a brief mapping of the key issues as a point of departure for this seminar. The rich and diverse pool of very highly qualified speakers here today will provide us with a unique opportunity to hear different country specific voices, experiences and insights that will further enrich this on-going debates.