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**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEW OR
RESTORED DEMOCRACIES**

**Interactive debate on the occasion of the
International Democracy Day**

**Panel Discussion on
“Democracy and the Millennium Development
Goals”**

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Mr. Chairman,

The forthcoming ten-year review at the United Nations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will raise a number of critical questions about the conditions under which countries, over the last decade since the goals were set in the 2000 Millennium Declaration, have made progress toward the MDG targets or did not, as a whole, manage to achieve them. There is good reason, in terms of historical trends and contemporary thinking to associate in much of the world advances in democratic governance with advances in development. And, the converse proposition is also to be expected: advances in development will likely yield further demands for citizen voice and for democratic participation. Moreover, there is evidence that in countries without viable state capacity and citizen participation, and that are plagued by conflict, displacement, or personal insecurity and armed violence, progress toward the MDGs has been stagnant or reversing.

It is difficult to make truly conclusive assertions about whether democratic governance improvements explain why some countries may or may not attain the MDGs: there are too many variables at play, too few years have passed, assessments of democracy may vary, or the outcomes are determined more by overall patterns of global economic performance during the decade. Still, the basis of policy at the United Nations and in other multilateral settings is that improvements in democratic governance do play a linchpin role in whether development goals are met. Democratic governance is essential because a functioning state that provides for security, ensures the rule of law, offers equal opportunity and voice to all social groups and individuals, and is selected accountable through electoral processes that provide for the mass participation is an essential prerequisite for sustainable gains in human development. And many practitioners argue that governance failures are at the heart of many of the crises of conflict, food insecurity, or mass displacements in recent years.

In a 21st century confronted with economic crisis, climate change and environmental stress, disease prevalence and potential, and widespread individual insecurity in the face of armed violence, further advances in democratic governance is essential to meeting these challenges. Many forward looking reports suggest that environmentally induced scarcity may generate local-level conflict, and that it is essential to have governance processes in place that can manage social differences over natural resource management. Technology, especially, continues to change global perceptions of democracy and

this continues to facilitate a global dissemination of democratic values and assertion of rights.

A critical finding of research and policy reflection on the relationship between democracy and development explored in both comparative politics and development studies is that there is inconclusive evidence on the relationships between regime type (democracy) and development (as measured in economic growth). First, evidence of the causal relationship in one direction or the other—democracy causes development, or development causes democracy—is mixed and contradictory. Additionally, the different definitions of democracy and development themselves pose significant limits. Indeed, with regard to democracy, for example, there is a healthy debate over democratic models and paradigms, over consensual and competitive democracy, and over the critical question of whether implicit in the democratic ideal is a commitment to social welfare and thus development. We indeed had an example of this lively debate from today's presentations.

Let me focus now on how we can move towards mutual reinforcement in development and democracy building. There is broad awareness that young democracies especially are susceptible or vulnerable to crisis, whether from uncontrollable sources—like negative economic shocks from the global economy—to internal political crisis as a consequence of the social dislocation that democratization often brings. A rapid rise in commodity prices and including basic food staples and energy sources such petroleum has affected all corners of the globe and millions of people, particularly those already living in extreme poverty. Multilateral organizations should work on leadership development to improve public sector management, economic policy making, and political leadership. Developing countries, on their part, need to improve their economic and political governance through a better management of their resources and the creation of an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Additionally, multilateral work should focus on institutional reform to improve the quality of democracy and make it sustainable.¹ Institutions are at the core of the project of making democracy of a better quality and more sustainable and there are currently many institutional innovations available (political party reform, electoral reform, judicial reform, local government reform, decentralization, etc.). Particularly, there needs to be continuing and additional focus on

¹ See the International IDEA State of Democracy assessment guide and tool kit on the approaches and options to assessing the quality of democracy in a given circumstance: <http://www.idea.int/sod/>.

the ways in which electoral systems and electoral institutions perform in terms of translating social interests into political participation and influence. Because there is no democracy without effective states, having a good institutional framework that makes governments efficient on all levels and accessible to people has been identified as a highly relevant. The effectiveness of democracy, the idea of good institutions under democracy, is central to the quality of democracy. Focus should be placed on local and regional governance, since they are nearest to people, as well as on parliament and the linkages between democracy and development can be best understood at the local level. Because there is no democracy without security, and there are many situations around the world where there is no freedom in terms of security and protection. Under such conditions democracy cannot be expected to flourish.

From a South-South cooperation perspective, the most useful lessons are those needed by countries that find themselves far behind with respect to both development and democracy. Global South countries can learn from each other on ways to conceptualize and implement a developmental state, drawing on the experience of those countries such as Brazil, India, Mexico, or South Korea on the opportunities for, and difficulties in, linking democratization and development agendas together. As well, there are rich experiences in the Global South in countries such as Botswana or Costa Rica that have maintained decades of viable democratic institutions and processes in the face of ongoing poverty.

Let me conclude with a comment on the way forward, on the next 5 years. The extent of accountability regarding the delivery on MDGs and what could be the corresponding role of the UN and development partners need to be further developed. Particularly, from the operational perspective of the MDGs, only the standard social and economic aspects prevail and the goals are silent (for the most part, except on the question of Gender equality or MDG#3) on issues such as respect for civil liberties, access to justice, or the role of the political society (legislatures, political parties, civil society organizations) and the media. Thus, there should be a clearer and more contextually-based understanding of the relationship between democracy and governance indicators across the board, and MDG performance over the first ten-year stretch of the MDG process.

I thank you for your attention.