



MEETING THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE:
PROMOTING & SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY

SPEECH DELIVERED

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Madam Chair, Secretary Robredo, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be here today to celebrate together this anniversary of the work and achievement of our partners at NCPAG. There are plenty of very good reasons to be doing this. One is that having been born in 1952 myself, it is highly encouraging to have a partner organisation which is also 60 and which is still becoming stronger, more relevant, more vibrant and more effective.

Another is more fundamental. NCPAG's mission in public administration and governance plays a fundamental role in developing and supporting democracy both here in the Philippines and more widely in the world. I've been asked to talk about '*promoting and sustaining democracy*'. I find myself grappling with the very concept of '*democracy promotion*.' What does this really mean? What message does it convey? Does the way we frame the concept itself tell us anything about sustaining democracy?

Many of you might recall that the political change forcibly imported from the US to Iraq not so long ago was done in the name of *democracy promotion* and *freedom*. That action and its consequences have defined the way we understand the words *democracy promotion*, associated with the notion of a *one-size-fits-all* model of democracy that can be exported to other nations at all costs. Even if you don't do this at the barrel of a gun, *democracy promotion* has become synonymous with externally imposed regime change. The effect has been a hardening of the democracy building landscape especially in authoritarian regimes and a hardening of the resolve of those who view democracy as a western imposition and not a universal global value.

The concepts we use not only tell a lot about how we view democracy, but more importantly, they have a bearing on how efforts at supporting and sustaining democracy are approached. The words you use are important. IDEA, as a body

whose member countries are all committed to democracy, defines its global mission as *'to support locally owned and sustainable democratic change worldwide'*, and the concepts of *'democracy building'*, *'democracy support'* and *'democracy cooperation'*. The words match the concepts. We believe that they communicate our conviction that there is no one model of democracy to be promoted, and that democracy can only be sustained if it is led, designed, developed and owned from within the community and from within the country. Democracy has one value, but many contexts.

And democracy is a global value, not a western or an Atlantic value. I have the good fortune to be working in Asia, with people and in societies that are dynamic, positive and optimistic. As political and economic power moves east, the countries of democratic Asia – India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines... - are each developing their own distinctive democratic context, each with a record of experience, with its own successes and challenges, but all building democracies with confidence and strength. The spread and sustainability of democracy will be strengthened when the 'traditional democracies' realise that democratic Asia is an equal partner in endeavour.

Democracy is also an aspiration for citizens in countries that are yet to democratise – as we see with the speed of the change now under way in Myanmar, once again change that is being driven from the inside. Democracy enjoys high support among citizens in all regions of the world. Only less than two years ago, however, analysts were convinced that the spread of democracy was grinding to a halt or was experiencing a roll back. Democracy seemed to have lost its position as a priority in the international agenda. However, the recent revolutions in the Arab World have ushered in a renewed optimism for democratisation in a region which only recently was characterized as immune to pressures to democratise. It seems once again that the spread of democracy is on a forward march!

But the story is not all optimism. Global Barometers data consistently show high support for democracy and low levels of satisfaction with it. High levels of unemployment, especially among youth, and growing inequalities are some of the factors instrumental in recent revolutions and 'occupy' movements in different parts of the world. This clearly calls for the democracy and development communities to work closely together to explore how democratic institutions and processes can facilitate economic and social welfare and how development assistance can support rather than erode the deepening of democracy. What democratic institutional frameworks – at national level, at local level, and at international level - help development? What frameworks hinder it? How is it sustained?

The sustainability of democracy will depend both on its continued spread and deepening, and on its ability to change the lives of ordinary citizens for the better. The time when citizens chose their representatives in an election and had to wait for the next election before being able to be heard again is over. Citizens around the world want democracy to deliver on its promise of a better life and will increasingly seek to become actively involved in demanding this. The assessment of democracy that inspires NCPAG's Regional Centre and is supported by IDEA's State of Democracy and State of Local Democracy tools is designed to help citizens break the closed circle of the exercise of power by political elites and commercial elites.

The surge of social movements or social moments empowered by social media and new communication technologies has propelled participatory democracy and citizen activism to unprecedented levels. Again the world balance of influence is changing: while the US predictably has the most Facebook users in the world, the next five countries are Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey, with the Philippines not far behind. Technology has enabled movements or moments to eject long standing dictators from office, not only in the Philippines, but recently in the Arab World. In

Senegal, a united opposition with support of civil society recently ousted, through the ballot, a president who had manipulated the provisions of the constitution to stay in office beyond his term limit. We have also witnessed and continue to witness how social media and citizen journalism have exposed human rights violations and atrocities perpetrated by repressive regimes.

It is important to note, however, that what is clearly a gain for active citizenship and participatory democracy is a challenge to the traditional form of representative democracy. As active citizens put pressure on institutions to deliver, politicians struggle to keep up with the demands of different sections of society and even the best of bureaucrats struggle to implement policies and decisions. Political systems struggle to find models which are responsive to these demands and not controlled by vested interests. The traditional political party is the least trusted democratic institution the world over. Social movements can further weaken the role of political parties in a democratic society, and the search must continue for an effective way of aggregating citizen interests in today's fluid and fast moving communication environment. Sustainable democracy requires a healthy balance between an active citizenry that can hold institutions accountable, and institutions that can deliver on the promise of democracy. Citizens and institutions need each other in order for democracy to flourish.

Democracy is only sustainable if it is inclusive. In spite of numerous international and national commitments to promote gender equality and the promotion of women in politics and decision making among others, democracy continues to be challenged by the persistent gender inequality in politics. The global average of women in parliament remains at only 19% despite the fact that women constitute half of the world's population. Many other exclusions in democratic processes occur along ethnic, age (youth), or religious lines. More often than not, intra-state conflicts are

triggered by the failure of democratic institutions to effectively manage and celebrate diversity.

Democracy is sustainable if it is successful in development outcomes and service delivery. I want here to emphasise the importance of strong democracy at the local level. We were all inspired on Wednesday night by the commitment, imagination and buzz of the city government here in Mandaluyong, by the active inclusion of the young, the disadvantaged and the disabled in the life and the public presence of the community. Local government that works well is in direct contact with citizens and involvement of citizens. It isn't always glamorous but it's extremely rewarding. Transforming the cemetery, as Mandaluyong has done, isn't necessarily headline news. But as a councillor myself some 30 years ago, representing a poor inner area of a big northern English city, I remembered the old lady who said to me 'I'm saving for my funeral every week, and I'm not dying until I've got it paid for'. Basic service delivery creates hope, builds and guarantees freedom from fear, freedom from insecurity, and the protection of dignity.

It is the work of political representatives and activists, of administrators and of citizens to provide that protection and that hope. The process of imagination and inspiration, disagreement and debate, of celebrating diversity and including the marginalised, and of effective implementation and delivery is not always smooth or easy. Supporting and building it is what NCPAG is for. It is what IDEA is for. We are proud to be working together in supporting the spread of democracy and the sustenance of democracy, and in inspiring democratic institutions, active citizens, and political leadership that is responsive and responsible to the aspirations of those citizens.

I thank you for listening!