



Opening remarks by International IDEA Secretary-General, Vidar Helgesen
International IDEA Annual Democracy Forum
Sustaining the Momentum of Democratization in the Arab World

Madrid, 28-29 November 2011

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, H.E. Trinidad Jiménez García-Herrera

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Botswana, the Honorable Phandu T.C. Skelemani

Former Prime Minister of the Libyan National Transitional Council, Mr. Mahmoud Jibril

Distinguished panelists and moderators

Senior representatives of International IDEA's Member States

Ambassadors

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to International IDEA's Annual Democracy Forum. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain - the current Chair of International IDEA's Council of Member States - for hosting this event.

It is a particular honor that Spain has chosen the building of the Congress of Deputies for the Democracy Forum – in many ways, the very bricks of this building have been witness to Spain's unique democratic story. From its origins in the mid-19th century, the Congress of Deputies has seen empires, wars and dictatorships - all as precursors to the consolidated and stable democracy which the Spanish people practice with vigour in these testing times.

We are also pleased to have the presence of the Foreign Minister of Botswana, one of International IDEA's most active African Member States – Botswana represents one of Africa's democratic success stories and we are delighted that you could be present here today.

International IDEA is particularly honored that Mr. Mahmoud Jibril, the former Prime Minister of the Libyan National Transitional Council, will address us with some opening remarks shortly. Given the focus of the Democracy Forum on the Arab world, it is only fitting that we can learn from someone who was successful in writing the most dramatic chapter so far in the story of the Arab Spring.

International IDEA's Democracy Forum is an annual event. When we began discussions with Spain on what the theme of the Forum should be *this* year, it was clear to all of us that it would have to be the extraordinary events which have been taking place in the Arab world. What was *not* clear to us when conceptualizing this event was how the momentum of events in the Arab world would re-shape the countries and political systems of the region. This Forum therefore provides an opportunity to reflect on the democratic transition in the Arab world one year after it began - and, more importantly, to reflect on how to *sustain the momentum of democratization* in the region.

The pace of change in the Arab world is such that looking back a year can seem like ancient history. Only in this last week have we seen a string of events across the region, each of which would have been sensational a year ago:

- A new government announced in Tunisia
- A new government taking office in Libya
- Egyptians presenting a manifest challenge to military rule as elections begin
- The President in Yemen agreed to step down
- Elections were held in Morocco (further to their reformed constitution)
- Demonstrations and occupation of the Parliament in Kuwait
- A scathing independent commission report on the brutal crackdown in Bahrain
- The Arab League adopted sanctions against Syria.

All this in one week. All set in motion by courageous citizens mobilizing peacefully to demand greater participation in decision-making and greater influence over political processes. Their resilience and courage - in the face of set-backs and in the face of the opposition of those who feared change - has been a lesson for us all. And their commitment to *continue* to pursue those aims of greater freedom and democracy in the face of violent oppression, has provided inspiration to people suffering from oppression throughout the world.

Today is a particularly significant day for Egypt with polling due to begin. Viewed by many as a regional leader, Egypt has strived for a new beginning. As the protests in the recent week have told us, however, Egyptians are frustrated with the pace and direction of change. Many want elections because only elections can establish a legitimate body to turn the will of the people into real change. On the other hand they see an electoral process designed to perpetuate remnants of the old regime, for a parliament which would have its powers minimized by continued military rule. Now democracy can be shaped in many ways, but if there is one absolute starting point, it is civilian control over the armed forces. In light of this, the Egyptian elections will not democracy make – but they do present an opportunity to commence the real democratization process in Egypt.

From democratization experiences across the world, we have learned that democracy is often not what you find in the pot when the heavy lid of authoritarian government is lifted. Building sustainable democracy requires: firstly, dealing with the past; secondly, national dialogue on visions for the future; and thirdly, the intricate design of institutions needed to deliver on those visions. All these processes take time and carry risks of setbacks.

It is hard enough for people to unify against a regime which is broadly viewed as illegitimate – it is more difficult to agree on what should be built in place of that regime – and even more difficult still to ensure that what is built will be lasting and deliver sustainable democracy. In some cases, an entire architecture of political and social exclusion needs to be dismantled and replaced by new and inclusive politics.

In line with this, international support for sustainable democracy must have a long-term perspective – democratic transition is a home-grown process which has its own momentum and which cannot be forced into international timetables. This applies not least in relation to

elections, where we have too often seen the integrity of the entire democratic process compromised when early elections are pushed by external actors. International support for sustainable democracy must also be non-prescriptive. It must accept that there will be setbacks and hurdles – transitions might sometimes take ‘one step forwards, two steps back’. It is during these challenging times that national democracy actors need the support of the international community to allow them the space and time to develop their own legitimate democratic institutions and culture - in a way which reflects their unique national circumstances.

It is International IDEA's firm conviction that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for the democratization and reform process underway in the Arab region. Since the beginning of this year, there has been a surge in requests for collaboration with International IDEA from several countries in the Arab region. We will seek to be a partner who is responsive to the leadership of those who are shaping the democratic future of their own country.

At the core of International IDEA's work on democracy is the notion of sharing comparative knowledge. This means that country experiences from one region of the world may present highly relevant learning opportunities for countries undergoing democratic transition. In this spirit, International IDEA is proud to have Spain as one of its Member States. Spain itself represents an enormous success story of democratic transition – having gone from a military dictatorship to a proud democracy and itself now actively supporting democracy in many regions of the world - not least Latin America and, of course, the Arab world. This October Spain saw the final announcement by ETA of an end to its armed activity - representing a milestone and setting the stage for democratic politics to be conducted where violence tried to stop it. The Spanish democracy-building example is a very relevant one and we encourage you to continue sharing your experiences with others, not least in the Arab region.

Through International IDEA's work in the field of democracy since 1995, we have maintained that we do not seek to define democracy, but we insist that democracy must build on two key principles: popular control over public decision-making, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control. On this basis, a range of decisions need to be made on key elements in democratic transition – the integrity of elections and electoral processes; inclusive constitutions which set out the path for a country's future; political parties and parliaments which legitimately

represent the people; political systems which support economic and social development; and, the inclusion of women and men equally in decision-making. In discussing how to sustain the momentum of the democratic transition in the Arab world, each and every one of these areas is crucial.

The first session of the Forum today focuses on democratic culture - or what we might call the 'software' of democracy. What are the challenges to building a culture which must be anchored in the values and particular conditions of the region, rather than imported from outside? This session focuses on key questions such as: how to make democracy and deep religious commitment mutually supportive; how to accommodate the role of minorities; and, how to ensure that women participate in the political process as equals.

The second session of the Forum focuses on what we might call the 'hardware' of democracy: how to reform and build institutions which support democratic processes. For example, the role of political parties and parliaments, as well as the security sector and the judiciary. Session three focuses on how to build a democracy which delivers on the economic and social development needs of its citizens. This is a critical success factor in democratic transition, in particular in the Arab world where the very motivation for many who revolted was lack of access to equal economic opportunity. Finally, we will seek to draw lessons from the Forum for how the international community can best support the democratic transitions underway in the region. Not least, we will be seeking to draw some lessons about what the role of International IDEA could be in this process.

During each session, we will be privileged to hear from some of the best-informed and influential experts from the Arab region and elsewhere. We will have an opportunity to hear from former Ministers, senior officials and heads of institutions from the region – from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Yemen – as well as high-level Spanish and international experts. We look forward to being inspired by your reflections and your views on how to tackle the multitude of challenges presented by the democratic shifts, which started one year ago.

I hope that the Forum will point the way towards how transition processes can be consolidated into inclusive stable democracy for the citizens of the Arab region – and not least how actors such as International IDEA can be a constructive partner in that work.

END