



International IDEA

**HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON
THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Statement by
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Millennium Declaration affirms that the UN will “spare no effort to promote democracy”. MDG#3 specifically highlights the importance of women’s political representation for gender equality.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome declaration confirms democracy as a “universal value” that is “interlinked and mutually reinforcing” with human rights, the rule of law, and development.

For International IDEA, as the only intergovernmental organization with a specific mandate to support democracy worldwide, it is of significance that this world body draws the linkage between democracy and development.

The rationale for this link is evident: for development to be genuinely sustainable, it must be owned and led by those whose development is at stake. Profound development, like democracy, can only be driven from within and below. For this to happen there is a need for open, inclusive, accountable structures for participation in society. Democracy serves the cause of development because it reinforces the “social contract” between citizens and decision makers. It provides for the necessary **democratic ownership** of the development process.

A critical but often weak link in ensuring democratic ownership is the political actors: notably political parties and parliaments. Too often they fail in their responsibility to capture citizens’ needs and expectations and transform them into policies and actions that deliver on development. Too often they fail in their responsibility to hold the executive to account. And too often the international community fails in its responsibility to support the strengthening of such democratic accountability processes through existing development cooperation frameworks.

If the next years of MDGs efforts are to be more successful, sustaining aid levels is not enough. Getting out of the global economic crisis is also not enough. If development is to be truly nationally owned, it requires more responsive national democratic politics. Responsive politics must include increased political participation of women. One of the intolerable democratic deficits worldwide that is also a barrier to human development is the continuing gross under-representation of women in politics. 15 years on from the Beijing target of 30 per cent representation of women in parliaments, only 24 parliaments worldwide have reached that target.

Democratic principles of participation, inclusion, regular free and fair elections, and an independent judiciary are more likely to bring about development gains than other systems of governance. Democratic participation supports development in three ways. **First**, elections empower people to articulate their interests. In elections governments will be held accountable if they don’t attend to the needs of the poor. **Second**, democracy requires freedom of speech and association, and it therefore facilitates the information to the government about the needs, aspirations, and preferences of the poor. **Third**, democratic governments are more efficient in providing public goods such as education, health care, job training, a clean environment, and, perhaps most critically, the rule of law.

This is why democracy is the most desired and desirable form of governance. Democracy is good for development. The opposite is also true: development is good for democracy.

Making this relationship work in practice is a daily challenge for actors in international development cooperation. Development and democracy agendas, including in those countries experiencing conflict, are often not well connected – and often not sufficiently integrated with conflict prevention and peacebuilding programming.

Through International IDEA's work on electoral processes, political participation, constitution building, gender equality, and democracy and development, we seek to create an enabling environment for the achievement of the MDGs.

In International IDEA it is critically important to support the integrity of electoral processes; the centrality of parliaments and political parties; and the effectiveness of sector-specific democratic dialogue for making sure that democracy delivers on key areas of human development, such as health, education, or community security.

Our work also shows that the rich democracy building experiences from the Global South can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the quality of democracy over time and country-level performance on the MDGs.

In conclusion, I reiterate International IDEA's commitment to contributing towards the achievement of the MDGs, in partnership with national, regional and global actors, and to deepen our strategic partnership with the United Nations in that endeavor.

I thank you for your attention.