

Inaugural speech by Dr. Daniel Zovatto,
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Inaugural ceremony
Strengthening political parties and campaign finance
in the Caribbean

Bridgetown, Barbados, May 8, 2013

Honorable Mr. Freundel Stuart, Prime Minister of Barbados;
Mr. Kevin Casas Zamora, Secretary of Political Affairs of the Organization of American States;
Honorable Representatives of the Electoral Management Bodies of the Caribbean countries;
Honorable Representatives of the Political Parties of the Caribbean countries;
Honorable Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Dear friends and colleagues;

In the name of Vidar Helgesen, International IDEA's Secretary-General, and in my own name, I first wish to thank our host, the Government of Barbados, a Member State of International IDEA and one of the founding member States of our Institute. Likewise, I wish to recognize the Organization of American States, with whom we share a long tradition of joint work and cooperation in the region.

We are honored to be in this beautiful country, and to have co-organized this important regional seminar about a subject which is enormously important for assuring the quality of our democracies.

IDEA has been present in the Caribbean for almost a decade. Our first activity was a research project on political funding, a joint effort by the OAS, International IDEA and the University of West Indies. The main output of this project was the publication of the report *From Grass Roots to the Airwaves - Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean*.

The overall objective of the study was to provide a comparative analysis of the 34 OAS member states, assessing not only the normative framework of political party and campaign financing, but also how legislation was implemented in the different countries of the region.

At the same time, we started our work in the Dominican Republic. In this country we established a strategic partnership with the Junta Central Electoral, the Parliament and the main political parties with the purpose of reviewing electoral and political legislation, and strengthening electoral authorities. In addition, during 2009 and 2010 we supported the Constitutional process, the adoption of the Constitution, and the creation of the Electoral Board and the Electoral Tribunal.

More recently, in 2011, we established our first program in Haiti, under the great leadership of my colleague Marie Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue, with the principal objective of supporting the process

of consolidation of democracy in the country, emphasizing five key areas: the role of the parliament; strengthening political parties; implementation of gender quotas; citizen-driven assessments of the state of democracy, and strengthening the Electoral Permanent Council.

Finally, last year, in close coordination with the OAS and the Electoral Commission of Jamaica, we co-organized the 8th Inter-American Meetings of Electoral Management Bodies to promote the exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices of electoral administrations in the region

As may be seen from these brief comments, International IDEA has been gradually but strongly increasing its presence and activities in the Caribbean and in the coming years we intend to continue to strengthen our work and visibility in this region.

I would now like to share with you some brief thoughts about the principal subject matter of this very important seminar. In the words of our Secretary-General, “democracy is a system in which the government is controlled by the people, and in which citizens are equals in the exercise of that control”. At the same time, we believe that participation is a basic element of sustainable democracy: without citizen participation, and the rights, freedoms and means to participate, the principle of popular control over government cannot begin to be realized.

While participation is one side of the coin, the other is representation – “If different groups of citizens are treated on an equal basis ... then the main public institutions will be socially representative of the citizen body as a whole.” Together, these concepts of participation and representation ensure that democracy and democratic institutions are not just about elites, but are a genuine reflection of the will of the people and their role in decision-making.

And if we talk about political participation and representation, we must necessarily speak of political parties, which play a key role in ensuring ideal levels of participation and representation in a democratic system.

Regretfully, and despite their importance, political parties worldwide are declining in popularity and the trust that they receive from citizens. At the same time, representative democracy cannot exist without political parties.

For political parties to remain relevant, they must become more attractive to those who wish to make their voices heard, in particular young people. They must also be able to interact with alternative forms of democratic organization, and learn from them.

International IDEA works on a range of initiatives to strengthen the capacity of political parties as effective agents for democratization and development. To bridge this participation and representation gap, IDEA engages in three main approaches: improving legal and regulatory frameworks; helping strengthen internal party capacities and internal democracy; and fostering dialogue and understanding.

Political parties are also a make-or-break factor for ensuring the full and equal participation of women in democratic politics. The under-representation of women in politics is a glaring global democratic deficit. There are few countries which can take pride in having equal participation of women in parliament and government – and few countries in which there is equal participation in political parties or in the administration of elections. Globally, women comprise only one-fifth of the members of parliaments. In Latin America as a whole, women represent 24% of the members of Upper Chambers in parliaments, and 22% of the members of Lower Chambers. In the Caribbean, on the other hand, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Database, only 13.71% of the members of Lower Chambers are women.

Issues such as the strengthening of women’s political participation, full compliance with legislation regarding quotas and equity, and political funding with a gender perspective are among the topics which International IDEA is fully committed to support with our work, programs and activities.

And now, allow me to move to the final point of my speech: the critical issue of money and politics.

The relationship between money and politics has become one of the great problems for democratic governments. The report published by the Global Commission a few months ago (an initiative led by the Koffi Annan Foundation and International IDEA) states that **“for all democracies, rich and poor, old and new, poorly regulated political finance is an important threat to elections with integrity.”**

I fully agree with this statement. The expansion of democracy, the growing complexity of electoral processes, and the awareness of the risks that corruption entails for the quality of democratic systems have placed funding of political activities at the core of public discussion worldwide.

The use of financial resources is a crucial element for democratic competition. Why? **Because even though democracy does not have a price, it certainly has operational costs.** Therefore, more than a pathology of democracy – as it is frequently presented in public discussion – political financing is a normal condition and a proof of soundness of democratic life.

It is precisely for this reason that it is important for the democratic system to control funding for political activities, rather than the other way around.

In trying to control the potentially negative influences of money on politics, countries around the world have introduced various provisions limiting who can contribute, and how much can be contributed to political parties and electoral candidates; how such funds can be used; how actors are required to report on their finances; and how oversight and enforcement is to be achieved. To permit analyses of individual countries and cross-regional comparisons of how countries regulate financing political parties and candidates, International IDEA has created the world’s leading

source of information on political finance regulation, with information from 180 countries. The information in the database has already served as the basis for national debates on legal reforms, and for discussions on regional and/or global standards by international organizations and by journalists who wish to place their country's system in a wider context. It is our hope that this source will continue to be used as a basis for reflection. My colleague Elin Falguera will present IDEA's Database in much greater detail.

Latin America and the Caribbean is also a region in which organized crime –particularly drug trafficking – is involved in the movement of billions of dollars every year, and is therefore capable of corrupting and subverting democratic institutions. If tackling regulation of political financing is an urgent task for democracies in this region, it is because the wide range of risks that come with a lack of effective regulation has become evident.

At IDEA we believe that the struggle to control spurious political funding practices has to be carried out in an intelligent, step-by-step manner. We also believe that it is crucial that the reforms which are adopted are accompanied by the resources necessary to permit their strong enforcement, as well as by the will to revise them when they show their unavoidable limitations. **In addition to good regulations, best practices should also be in place.**

The aim of reforms to political funding must be to gradually improve conditions of equity and transparency, while at the same time establishing and maintaining equitable and transparent funding regimes of the activities of political parties, as set forth in Article X of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Honorable Prime Minister, Mister Secretary of Political Affairs, dear friends and colleagues: as we can see, we have a lot on our plate to discuss in the coming two days, and I look forward to a rich and lively discussion. We are privileged to have not only a series of very distinguished speakers in the panel discussions, but also very distinguished representatives of electoral bodies and political parties, which makes me feel very optimistic about the results of our activities. Thank you very much, and I wish you much success in our activities.