Annual Democracy Forum 2015

"Accountability as a Central Element of Deepening Democracy"

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Synthesis by International IDEA Secretary-General Yves Leterme

Representatives of Member States of International IDEA,
Distinguished Participants,

- I would like to thank all speakers and participants for engaging, dynamic and substantive debates over the past two days.

- This ADF has been very productive and I think we have all learned something from the interesting discussions.

- I have appreciated **the mix of panelists**, which provided multi-faceted discussions both from researchers and academics, as well as practitioners in the field, and policy-makers.

- The discussion has allowed, I hope, to build a **network of accountability practitioners** that will continue to exchange ideas and hopefully find ways of collaborating together on future initiatives.

- I now have the ambitious task of presenting a **synthesis of our discussions**.

- I will highlight the **most pressing issues, challenges and opportunities for further engagement for strengthening democratic accountability**.

- As highlighted by the keynote speaker - UN Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson:

  "Accountability is essential to make sure that institutions are responsive to the will of the people. We all know that resilient democracies need institutional checks and balances. They need this for protection against impunity, corruption and abuse of power."

- Mr. Eliasson continued highlighting how **accountability plays a crucial role in a number of processes,** including **electoral processes, human rights** and **participation of civil society.**

- While civil society engagement is key in accountable democracies, he also emphasized the importance of strong **institutions** as central elements for building sustainable development.

- The panelists in session I discussed who **the key actors in the accountability landscape** are, including the role of *parliaments, political parties, media, civil society and social movements, local governments, ombudsman offices and supreme audit institutions and even the private sector*, in the accountability chain.

- One of the issues I took from the discussion was how diverse the roles can be between different institutions in the accountability chain:

  - some institutions act as **agents** of accountability (eg parliaments and elected representatives);
  - some as **monitors** of accountability (supreme audit institutions);
  - some as **exacters** of accountability (civil society organisations);
  - and as **watchdogs** of accountability (the media – and the importance of public broadcasting and balanced media reporting).

- Some institutions also have **dual roles**: parliaments are for example accountable to citizens, but also monitor the accountability and performance of the executive.

- Another element of the discussion that stood out was the importance of **ensuring that even actors that demand or monitor accountability** – such as **civil society or the media** – also need to ensure that they are themselves accountable. *This brings the question of who watches over their accountability?*

- But also recognizing the **key role that civil society and the media** play in **fostering debate, in deepening democratic practices and culture**, and in strengthening the capacity of citizens to hold their governments to account.

- The session also highlighted how a **number of factors can break the accountability chain between institutions and the electorate**: from the **private financing of political parties** to issues of loyalty of **elected politicians** that often, represent the interests and needs of the party, are **accountable to their party leadership and even other external interests and less to their constituencies**. The need to reform political parties and to put political party finance under scrutiny, were also discussed.

- International IDEA´s work on Money and Politics focuses on this issue and we have brought our publications that are available to all outside of this room and that we hope can be of use for thinking further on this issue.

- Another issue that came out of the discussion was also the **pre-condition for any accountability to take place: transparency and guaranteed access to information.** Without information in its hands, citizens cannot hold the government and state to account, because they do not have elements to asses state performance.

- The discussion highlighted the importance of the **adoption of legal frameworks** on access to information. But also **moving beyond legal frameworks to implementation** and its challenges. Panelists emphasized the difficulty of **changing secretive mentality and practices** within many state bureaucracies. And creating **systems of information that are easily available to citizens and the media.**

- The session emphasized the **key role of the media in ensuring accountability** in a time when real time information informs decision-making and has the power to shift

public opinion overnight. The risk that media is coopted, threatened or silenced is high in many countries and we need to counteract such tendencies.

- I thought it was interesting to hear **experiences from both developing and developed countries.** And to **not only use developed countries as role models for developing countries**. But to hear the honest account of the Swiss parliamentarian who shared both the cutting-edge experiences of direct democracy practices in Switzerland. But who also very **honestly shared the accountability flaws** in the Swiss system (banking secrecy, lack of asset disclosure). Compared to Namibia and many other countries, where the practice is for policy-makers to disclose incomes.

- Finally, session 1 highlighted a very important issue: **the linkage between democracy, accountability and development**. The **need for democracies to deliver to its citizens.** The need for the concept of accountability to stretch beyond the voting mechanism, to **deliver services needed for citizens to live dignified lives**: provide access to water, education, health services and food. **The legitimacy of democracy as a system of governance is closely tied to its ability to achive improved living conditions for its people.**

- One of the main policy recommendations that emerged from session I is about the need to build **holistic and comprehensive accountability systems** and networks that work together to tackle the issue of accountability.

- This is necessary and can be done by developing shared understandings and forging strong partnerships among the different stakeholders and actors of accountability. Panelists gave concrete examples of how alliances can be built even in difficult settings, by identifying accountability "champions" to support reforms.

- The panelists in session 2 presented an interesting discussion that **mixed academic with practitioner perspectives on the ground.**

- While the first session focused mainly on political accountability, session 2 introduced the concept of **social accountability** (how **citizens and civil society organizations demand accountability to policy-makers and service providers**).

- The discussions focused on the "**how**" and put forward a series of very practical policy solutions to build better accountability mechanisms, using examples from various countries, including Malawi, Tanzania, the Philippines and Serbia, among others.

- The discussion presented very interesting examples of how **social accountability mechanisms can be used to empower poor citizens and service users to demand better services**, in for example health and education service delivery contexts.

- The discussion also emphasized the importance of implementing **tailor-made accountability mechanisms** that take into account the level of collective action characteristic of each particular community.

- A really interesting part of the discussion was the **recognition of social accountability processes as fundamentally political in nature.**

- However, donors have often promoted such mechanisms as **technical mechanisms without recognizing the political nature of such processes.**

- The discussion also brought out the **challenge of bringing such initiatives to scale beyond the community level to affect policy-making.**

- Central in the discussion was also the importance of **measuring** results. As one of the speakers said "you can only make a real change when you are able to measure the change".

- An example was given of how a citizen-led democracy assessssment can function to monitor accountability and propose policy recommendations.

- The discussion on measurement reminds us of the important task that awaits us in the next months in terms of completing the work of **setting indicators** for the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

- **The panelists in session 3** discussed the **2030 agenda for sustainable development** and the important milestone it represents for achieving sustainable development.

- The SDGs represent an **important shift from the Millenium Development Goals** as they are **universal** and **emphasize the responsibilities of both developing and developed countries.**

- They also provide an **important recognition of a dimension that was missing in the MDGs: the political dimension.** Especially through **SDG 16 on peace, justice and inclusive societies.** This goal represents a major global recognition for the issues International IDEA and many of you gathered here today advocate for. This is also the case for **goal 5 on gender equality.**

- **Goal 16** is important because it **underscores inter-linkages between rule of law, accountability and peace** and because it **provides an entry point for democratic accountability.**

- And as Jan Eliasson pointed out in his opening speech: **accountability is the "glue" that holds the whole 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda together.**

- Now the **definition of indicators** (March 2016) for monitoring the implementation of the 2030 agenda will be **key for ensuring the accountability of implementation**. This by provding concrete indicators for measuring progress towards achievement of 2030 targets.

- Another **accountability dimension of the 2030 agenda** will be the **participation of international, regional, national and local actors in the monitoring of the implementation**: the active role of **regional organizations, of parliaments and of civil society actors and the media, in both developing and developed countries alike**.

- We hope that a broad set of country-level **actors from all sectors of society – including youth and women -** can play a **watchdog function** and participate in the **elaboration of national reports** on the implementation of the 2030 SD agenda.

Closing Remarks

- I would like to highlight an issue that I believe we have touched upon during these two days, but that I also consider a very important element of the accountability equation: **the importance of highlighting the responsibilities of citizens in accountability processes.** Especially as **technological tools and social media have narrowed the gap between decision-makers and citizens.**

- In this regard, International IDEA has just published a set of **guidelines for social media use**, that provide a code of conduct that will ensure that social media is used in a responsible and constructive way in accountability processes and not to promote hate speech.

- International IDEA has also produced a wealth of comparative knowledge resources that bring to light many other elements of the accountability agenda and present policy-makers and practitioners with reform proposals, ideas and lessons from all parts of the world.

- I would like to highlight today one of these resources "**Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery: A Practical Guide to Identifying Improvements through Assessment**". This publication provides a citizen-led assessment framework to analyze accountability mechanisms from a democratic point of view and define/design reforms for ensuring that democratic accountability mechanisms are better at facilitating rather than impeding service delivery.

- It allows countries both at the national and sub-national levels to put into practice the principles of inclusion and accountability discussed at this forum.

- Before I end, I would like to spend a few words about our media partner DEVEX. This is a media organization that specializes in international development. Some of you have been interviewed by the DEVEX team. Their work at this event is part of the online campaign called **#democracymatters**.

- As part of this campaign, our Forum has been preceded by several online events, including a very active and dynamic tweetchat. I am saying this because I want to highlight how our debate on accountability through the campaign will reach a very

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wide audience and how the issues and solutions proposed in these two days, will be part of the ongoing campaign.

- I would like to thank all of you for attending yesterday and today, both to participants, panelists and moderators.

- I also want to thank Minister Burkhalter for hosting this event and to Minister Purevsuren for honoring us with his presence and for accepting to take over the Chairship of International IDEA in 2016.

- I hope we can continue these important conversations over the months ahead.

- THANK YOU