



Speech by Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General, International IDEA

Launch of the African Union Commission and International IDEA

Joint Activity Plan

12 September 2008

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Excellency Mrs Julia Dolly Joiner, Commissioner for Political Affairs,

Excellencies, Distinguished participants

- It is a pleasure today to present to you a Joint Activity Plan between the African Union and International IDEA for supporting democracy in Africa.
- I want to thank you for the interest and commitment demonstrated by your presence – particularly on this day on which it could be so tempting to take leave. And in this context, Happy New Year to you all.
- Let me also thank Commissioner Joiner and her team for the openness to partnership and collaboration which has marked the development of the plan.
- This plan comes out of an extended process of consultations between the AU Commission and International IDEA.
- The implementation of the plan will be an even longer-term process. I could even say at the outset that the 5 year timeframe of the plan is only a start. Throughout the process we will depend on close consultations and partnership with all of you present here today.
- To this first meeting we have invited member states of International IDEA; six of whom are also members of the African Union. Established in 1995, International IDEA is the

only intergovernmental organization with a specific mandate from our currently 25 member states to support sustainable democratic change worldwide.

- Our approach is one of supporting democracy as a long-term, non-linear process which must be led from within societies and must reflect the realities of each society. There is no one-size-fits-all model of democracy. Therefore, our approach is one of making global comparative knowledge available to inform and inspire democratization efforts.
- It is this approach to democracy building which has informed our collaboration with the African Union in recent years, not least when we supported the process of developing the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The adoption of the Charter inspired us to work together on the Joint Activity Plan.
- Globally we see democracy today being challenged in various ways, and in new ways.
  - o Challenges to the long-held notion that democracy is best for development, for example when remarkable economic successes are produced by countries with other political systems
  - o Challenges from the fact that democracy promotion has been perceived as part of agendas for violent regime-change from the outside

- Challenges from autocratic regimes empowered by high oil and gas prices and seeking to project influence beyond their borders
  - Challenges to the notion that democracy is the best way of managing conflict, as elections have gone violent in several countries
  - Challenges from the widespread distrust of people in political parties and parliaments seen as elitist and unable to deliver on economic development and social justice.
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- But we also see signs of hope and promise, not least by people living in very different societies and under very difficult conditions, demonstrating time and time again that they want to have the voice that only democracy can secure them.
  
  - Africa is no exception to some of these challenges as well as signs of promise. The Joint Activity Plan is designed to support the African Union in responding to the challenges facing democracy across the continent: Making democracy work better for development, peace and security through strengthening political institutions and processes.
  
  - Politics matter to the lives of people. This is why making democratic politics work better is of key importance to development, peace and security in Africa. And that again, is why it is important to provide more support to the African Union's efforts to build capacity for political engagement.

Building such capacity for political action can help prevent conflict instead of continuing the all too familiar pattern of reacting when conflict has already broken out.

- Building such capacity for political action can also help put in place democratic processes that can better meet the needs of people for economic and social development.
- From the side of International IDEA we will offer our global comparative knowledge resources, and the collective resources of our member states, as a source for the African Union. We will support AU-led processes: and not least the ambitions expressed in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. In developing the plan, each activity has been linked to specific objectives of the Charter.
- The plan can only come live if resources are made available. The AU Commission and International IDEA want to engage in a dialogue with interested governments – not least those gathered here today – about setting up mechanisms that can ensure timely, efficient, accountable and transparent channeling of funds towards the plan.
- In this context, I am profoundly pleased that even before today's launch we have received contributions from Australia, Germany and Canada. I thank these governments for ensuring in this way that we get started, and I look forward to engaging with many more governments in seeking strong commitments to the implementation of this plan.

- Let me thank the AU Commission, represented today by Commissioner Joiner, for the collaboration that has gone into developing the plan, and my own team, led by Dr Abdalla Hamdok.
- Abdalla is leaving International IDEA at the end of this month to take up a position in this city at the ECA, and I assure you we are already discussing a partnership with the ECA in reinforcing this process.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for your attention and look forward to working closely together in support of democracy in Africa.