

***Welcoming Address of Doctor Daniel Zovatto, Regional Director for Latin America of International IDEA, during the Opening Ceremony of The International Colloquium of Santo Domingo***

Distinguished President of the Republic, Dr. Leonel Fernández,  
Madame Representative of the Rector of Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dr. Ramonina Brea,  
Ambassador of Spain to The Dominican Republic, Diego Bermejo  
Executive Director of Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo, Marco Herrera  
Representative of CIEPLAN, Alejandro Foxley  
Distinguished participants in this International Colloquium of Santo Domingo  
Secretary of State  
Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps  
Ladies and Gentlemen

In the first place, on behalf of IDEA' s Secretary General, Ambassador Vidar Helgesen, I would like to express my special gratitude to President Leonel Fernández as well as to the representatives of the organizing and host institutions for the support they have given us to organize and carry out this International Colloquium.

Likewise, I would like to thank each one of you, the participants of this event, for taking time out of your busy agendas in order to be able to be here with us with the aim of holding a fruitful and thorough dialogue, and an enriching exchange of ideas on the current situation and the future agenda of democracy, development, and security in Latin America within the context of the celebration of Thirty Years of the Third Democratic Wave.

2008 and 2009 represent a milestone for the political and democratic life of our region. We are commemorating the first three decades since the ***Third Democratic Wave*** began its journey through our Continent back in 1978 and 1979 in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. Since then, the region has experienced, with its ups and downs, achievements and setbacks, the longest, most extensive, and deepest democratization process in all of our history.

In general terms, Latin America presents a unique situation, unparalleled in the world scenario since it exhibits countries which are almost in its entirety democratic political regimes; however, it also depicts broad sectors of its population living below the poverty line (close to 40%), and with the most

unequal distribution of wealth.

There are reasons for hope as well as for frustration that emerge from these 30 years of democracy. There are reasons to look at the glass as half full or half empty.

Undoubtedly, the progress made in terms of free and fair elections, validity and respect for human rights and democratization is significant, it is an asset that we have to acknowledge and cherish. Nonetheless, our democracies present flaws and diverse degrees of frailty. They also face enormous challenges such as political stability, governance and the state of law, independence and the relationship among powers, the performance of electoral systems, and the system of political parties. In addition, the serious problems concerning citizen security have turned our region into one of the most violent regions in the world. On the other hand, the coup d'état, which took place in Honduras on June 28<sup>th</sup> and which led the country to a profound political crisis, is not only unacceptable, and regrettable, but it also represents a wake up call, which warns us of the important challenges we face ahead.

However, and without dismissing or underestimating the quantity and seriousness of the challenges we have to face, in my opinion, during these thirty years, not only have we managed to recover democracy and make it last, but we have also been able to generate support for it on the part of the citizens as it can be seen from the data gathered by Latinobarometro. This is by no means a small accomplishment. Nowadays the debate is not between democracy or authoritarianism; it is rather about the quality of democracy and how to build more and better citizenry; it is about how to make the transition from an electoral democracy to a citizen and institution democracy; it is about how to conciliate democracy with development within the context of societies with higher levels of social cohesion, and gender equity. Nowadays, it is about how to look for a more strategic relationship between the market and the State, and a more functional relationship between the State and the Society. It is about how to make democracy meet the new types of demands that emerge from more complex, more modern, more urban societies. It is about how to make democracy function more efficiently within a global international context. All these topics pose a problem to democracy and they must be discussed democratically, and their answers must be found democratically as well.

In other words, in my opinion, the main debate nowadays deals with how to

design and put into practice democratic and political-institutional options which are able to meet the demands of the citizens (political, economic, social, and cultural) particularly the demands that concern poverty and equity within a context marked by accelerated and complex globalization. All these challenges take place in a Latin America characterized by an increasingly structural-heterogeneous diversity which depicts important ideological differences, and which continues to experience difficulties to make progress in terms of integration, and which has also been unable to act, at an international level, with only one voice to fight for its interests.

To hold an open and direct dialogue on democracy, development, and security; to really take the pulse of the region in regard to these topics, and to identify the main challenges of the next decade are the reasons why we have gathered all of you in this International Colloquium in Santo Domingo.

The opportunity to analyze the current situation, and try to define a future agenda for the upcoming decade could not be, in my opinion, timelier. In addition to celebrating Thirty Years of Democracy, the region is beginning to emerge (in different ways and at different speeds) from the world's economic and financial crisis whose effects, not only financial and economic but also social and political, we have not fully assessed yet. Within this context, we also bring to the table the renewed debate on the new role of the State, and the relationship between the State and the market.

On the other hand, precisely this year, the region begins a new electoral rally in light of which between 2009 and 2012 practically all the countries in the region will hold general presidential elections. We are then facing a moment of historic inflection in terms of democracy and development. Thus, as it happens with every inflection, crisis and change stage, it is loaded with challenges but also with important opportunities.

In addition to the sense of opportunity of this gathering, which I previously mentioned, there are other factors that play in favor of the success of our deliberations. These factors are: the quality and expertise of each and every one of you, the participants in this event; the academic excellence of our partners, particularly, the Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra and its Rector, as well as the excellence of CIEPLAN and FUNGLODE, this latter lending its fabulous facilities and staff; and specially the political leadership, intellectual rigour and kindness of our host President Leonel Fernández.

Thank you very much and much success in your work.