



Promoting Political Freedom and Deepening Democracy
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“Future Directions for Democracy Support”

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Panel Remarks

I want to begin by expressing appreciation to the conference organizers Robert Grant from Wilton Park and Chris Child from ERIS. They both have worked hard and made this conference productive for a rather tough-minded collection of people. Robert’s presence in the sessions has added humor and discipline, as well as substance. Chris has done his best to remain silent through our proceedings, though his voice rings through the title of this conference, the framing of the annotated agenda and selection of many of the participants. From his days at the Commonwealth Secretariat through his role at ERIS, we owe much to Chris for untiring work and his keen ability to provide vision. He has proven himself as an invaluable leader in this developing community of ours.

Please join me in applauding their critical contributions.

We should also take a moment to note what is happening in Iran as we deliberate about how to assist democratic activists. Putting aside for a moment questions about how the results of the Iran’s presidential election were determined, the importance of elections for expressing the people’s will is resounding as clearly as the chants of the hundreds of thousands who are marching in the streets of Iran. By official counts, at least 17 have been killed in the government’s post-election crackdown, many more have been beaten, press freedoms and other rights have been trampled. However, the people’s drive to share information, including dramatic images, is defeating censorship, as they continue to assemble peacefully to protest. While we cannot predict where these events will lead, no crackdown can repress indefinitely people’s desire for government based on their will.

It is the hard question of this conference to determine how to appropriately support those seeking democratic progress in such difficult environments, as we are also asked to consider how best help those seeking to deepen democracy where there is room and good will to do so.

I am speaking today based on 25 years of experience that NDI has accumulated in standing with those who seek to advance democratic progress in their countries and 25 years of working in coordination with others who offer similar support. Just over half of my 30 years of promoting human rights, citizen empowerment and democratic development are merged with NDI, which has taken me to more than 50 countries to join with those working on the ground and given me responsibility for contributing to the Institute’s program strategy. I speak humbly, and I hope forcefully, because it is an honor to be asked by democratic activists and campaigners to assist them in efforts, which are difficult and often both frustrating and expended at significant personal risk.

NDI offices now operate in over 60 countries, with more than 1,000 people in our ranks – most of whom are not Americans. This is evidence of a hallmark of the Institute - that is, involving people from around the world and from differing political traditions in our work to support democratic development. This makes us more credible and more effective.

We've been honored by people in this room who have joined NDI efforts as volunteers, including Maria Leissner, Dr. Afari-Gyan, Nora Schimming-Chase, Dr. Mutukwa, Saumura Tioulong, David French and Percy Medina – and I am proud to say that Maria Leissner, Denis Kadima and Marcin Walecki all honored NDI by serving as our staff representatives for some time. Many more of you have been our partners in efforts around the world; and I have to mention UNEAD, the European Commission, ODIHR, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, International IDEA, the Carter Center, EISA, Idasa and the domestic election monitoring groups and networks present, and donors represented here, especially the National Endowment for Democracy, as well as DFID, CIDA and SIDA have supported our work, as has USAID and others who are not with us today.

So, through this exercise in transparency, I have revealed that there is nothing that I can say that others around the table could not offer.

As we look into the future, it is unmistakable that three types of environments will continue to present themselves as major challenges:

- Countries that are emerging from protracted conflict and/or where the potential for widespread violence must shape our approaches to assisting those working to advance democratic development;
- States where those holding power are intent on consolidating non-democratic regimes, even if they are offering facades of democratic institutions and processes, while employing autocratic methods and/or are highly influenced by corruption and in some cases by criminal cartels; and
- Countries where there is a will and openness to pursue democratic development but short histories of open societies with the political pluralism and competitive politics and where there are significant constraints on resources needed to entrench democratic practices and address quality of life issues.

This conference addressed the latter two types of environments, and acknowledged the importance of the first. In any particular country, elements of all three types of environments are likely to exist, but typically one will predominate. In all, attention must be paid to mitigating potentials for violence, as well as to expanding genuine opportunities for exercising rights and freedoms that are integral to democratic development, and, in all, democratic processes must deliver improvements in quality of life issues for the vast majority of people.

It is therefore all the more important to stress that one size does not fit all. Work in each country must be tailored, reevaluated and modified to maximize impact of our assistance and to avoid doing harm.

The next point that I would offer as a lesson learned for the future is that democracy assistance of any type and in any country must meet at least a minimum ethical framework, some elements of which were referenced in our discussions. I will mention four.

- First, there must be a basis in international law for assistance offered by state actors through foreign ministries, donor agencies or other means, as well as by nongovernmental organizations, just as it is required for intergovernmental action. International human rights law, and in some instances humanitarian law, provide this basis. This establishes a normative framework for our actions, including respect for the norm against discrimination based on gender, race, color, religion, ethnicity, national or social origin, or other such status, or political or other opinions. Thus, international law provides legitimacy for our work and ensures that it respects sovereignty and promotes people's rights. This is not to negate the importance of geo-politics and bilateral interests, but it safeguards the integrity of democracy support.
- Second, we must ensure that the beneficiaries of our efforts are the people of a country – not those holding power at a particular moment or some narrow private or bilateral interest. This is equally critical when we are strengthening civil society organizations, media, legislatures, political parties or executive branch offices. This recognizes the democratic principle that sovereignty belongs to and flows from the people of a country.
- Third, we must also meet the responsibility to offer the most effective assistance techniques possible, based on accumulated experience and based on empowering local actors with sustainable solutions that are balanced against the exigencies of the circumstances. To do less violates the trust of those asking for assistance and the people (taxpayers or others) who fund the support.
- And fourth, we must work openly and with partners who are committed to pluralism, tolerance and nonviolence. It is not enough to work with those who are “in opposition” or who are “in power;” we must encourage the development of democratic values and methods through our assistance.

I offer these points in recognition of the progress we have made over the years in our discourse, as well as in our actions. We should be able to speak frankly to each at this point and at the same time invite others to hold us accountable for our flaws and failings where they exist.

The next point that I would offer is that democracy, rule of law, good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms are inseparable and interdependent. Progress in one area is possible to certain extents, and breakthroughs in one area can take place, but there must be improvements in the others to achieve substantial and sustainable democratic development.

Simultaneously, there is interconnectedness between political and economic development. I know of no one who seeks democracy simply for the sake of an ideal. They do so because they are convinced that it is the best way over time to create stable governments that can withstand stress and improve the lives of their children and grandchildren. Those working to advance democratic progress in their countries need therefore to demonstrate to the broad population that, as a system, democracy is capable of delivering improved conditions. This requires addressing substantive issues, developing policies toward them that prioritize and allocate resources and creating effective service delivery mechanisms and accountability.

To advance the interrelation of democratic and economic development (or, if you prefer, to advance civil and political rights in significant part as a means to promoting economic, social and cultural rights) political institutions, organizations and processes must be engaged, as well as executive offices, courts, civil society and the media.

This entails strengthening political parties and political parties' roles in legislatures. A clear challenge for the future of democracy support is to break down the wall between what we

commonly refer to as “political party building” versus “legislative strengthening” – which too often is approached as if the legislature is separate from political development. If democracy is to deliver, parties need to develop positions on substantive issues – such as education, HIV/AIDS and other health issues, environmental protection, energy, job creation and other economic matters.

A party headquarters cannot do that in a vacuum from its party caucus in parliament – or from its branches and local office holders. Nor should a parliamentary caucus operate in isolation from its party and constituents.

Just as we cannot address party building simply as a matter of mechanical structural development devoid of issues and internal democratic processes –

- We cannot effectively assist legislative strengthening without addressing the relationship of the party caucus to the headquarters.
- We cannot assist coherent policy development without the addressing the relationship of legislative and electoral strategies.
- And, we cannot assist coalition building to advance a legislative agenda without taking up developing relationships with civil society interest groups and constituent relations.

As you probably noted, these matters are not well suited to workshops but are better taken up through assisted practice on the ground, study exchanges and other types of sustained interactions.

Such assistance should not write prescriptions for the content of policy or legislation – that would usurp the sovereign role of parties, parliament and civil society – but such assistance should help party leaders and parliamentarians understand where to turn for reliable information and examples for their consideration, and assistance can facilitate dialogue about the policy formulation process.

This can be done within specific parliaments; for example, I recently joined efforts of the Liberian House and Senate committees on electoral reform to facilitate their consideration of a range of issues, thereby complementing ongoing assistance provided by NDI’s country representative.

Assistance can be provided in a manner that strengthens regional institutions, as when we joined the SADC Parliamentary Forum, represented here by Dr. Mutukwa, in building capacities of the Forum’s 14 member parliaments’ health committees in addressing effective approaches to HIV/AIDS policy development and oversight of service delivery.

Assistance can also strengthen civil society’s relationships with parties and parliament, for example, NDI worked as a junior partner in Peru with the local NGO Transparencia, represented here by Percy Medina, in facilitating the consensus building process of the parliamentary caucuses on the health care policy that now is being implemented.

These examples illustrate that assistance to political parties and parliaments needs to be a sustained engagement, just as electoral assistance in its various forms needs to go around the election cycle. Please allow me to indulge in an example of how the electoral cycle approach relates to political parties and parties in parliament.

Electoral reform includes legislative action, which requires political parties and their caucuses to:

- develop capacities to analyze legal frameworks for elections;

- determine what elements of the framework to maintain and parts to change;
- identify legislative coalition partners and civil society support needed to achieve those goals; and
- develop a public relations strategy to ensure that popular support is built for the effort and reform is achieved.

Of course, civil society organizations can use such opportunities to follow-up on observation recommendations, advance an advocacy agenda and conduct parliamentary watchdog activities.

The skills parties develop in analyzing legal frameworks can be immediately employed to design training programs for branches and frontline activists in identifying abuses of the political rights of party activists and supporters. This in turn requires sufficient internal party training capacities and developing materials on respecting the rights of political competitors and on information gathering to meet burdens of proof required for seeking peaceful redress, rather than using violent “self help” tactics. It requires building capacities of party legal experts on using complaint procedures and making effective arguments for effective remedies.

All of this requires developing efficient communication mechanisms from the headquarters to the grassroots and back. Such activities reinforce electoral integrity, mitigate the use of violence, strengthen party structures and create avenues for new leaders to emerge, including women and young people. Programs of this type can be related to justice sector reform assistance concerning electoral complaint mechanisms that advance the rule of law.

Programs like these can be conducted in countries where political freedom is constricted by autocratic governments as well as in places where democracy can be deepened. The context requires modifying techniques to suit national conditions, but that can be done.

Having touched on political parties and peeked at legislatures, please allow me to address briefly lessons for future approaches to civil society strengthening called for by our agenda.

The point about assisted practice with political parties and legislatures also applies to civil society. NDI engages in a wide range of civil society strengthening programs, but I will concentrate on the one that has been most discussed in our conference, domestic election monitoring.

In 1986, we first observed an election. It was in the Marcos-Aquino contest in the Philippines. We’ve observed hundreds of election processes since. More important, by using long-term engagement right from the start, we discovered the credible and comprehensive work of the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections or NAMFREL, which was organized in large part through Catholic and other faith-based networks. Approximately 100,000 NAMFREL observers recorded the votes count from polling stations across the country, which were then added in what NAMFREL coined as a “Quick Count”. The effort demonstrated that the official results tabulation differed greatly from an honest addition of the polling station counts.

Our international observation mission helped expose that fact, and the dramatic experience drove home to NDI the importance of helping to spread domestic election monitoring and helping to advance techniques for systematic, credible nonpartisan election observation.

Less than a year later, we helped Chileans learn from Filipinos and develop a vote count verification using a statistical sample of polling stations (referred to as a “Parallel Vote Tabulation” or “PVT”) that was instrumental in forcing the Junta to announce that its plebiscite to extend General

Pinochet's rule lost at the polls. From there we have helped over 300 organizations and coalitions in 75 countries to develop domestic election observation and assisted over 100 PVT's, which now examine the quality of voting and counting, as well as results verification, and employ SMS and other new communication technologies. Our assistance methodology from the beginning has been to allow monitoring leaders various countries to learn from each other, while NDI has drawn out best practices and contributed to advancing monitoring techniques.

Through such efforts domestic monitoring has broadened to systematically address many elements of the election cycle, and, for example, PVTs by domestic monitoring organizations have played important roles:

- in confirming public confidence in election-day processes and official results – recently in Ghana, Zambia and Malawi and not so long ago in Montenegro's independence referendum and many other places;
- in preventing fraud, for example by stopping Robert Mugabe from steeling the first round of Zimbabwe's election last year and preventing Fujimori's theft or the 2000 first round in Peru – those PVTs were conducted by groups represent at this conference, ZESN and Transparencia; and
- in exposing fraud, for example, in Georgia, whose Election Commissioner is with us today, and other places.

Other systematic techniques have been developed, adopted and spread by domestic monitors for verifying voter registries, media monitoring and examining other elements of the election process.

Experience and skills transfer among domestic monitoring activists has been an integral part of NDI's approach to this assistance. There is now a vast network in some regions with groups helping each other, with little or no assistance needed from NDI. Regional associations of these groups have developed in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia – the OSCE region – and Constine Marza is hear from that network – the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations or ENEMO; Alejandra Barrios Cabrera is here from the Latin American network Acuredo de Lima. Irene Petras is here from the SADC Election Support Network of domestic monitoring organizations, and there are similar networks in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region), and they are developing elsewhere.

These are important examples of cross-boarder experience, knowledge and skills sharing. NDI is facilitating the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), which includes 115 organizations and regional networks. GNDEM is a knowledge sharing and communications network that will reinforce the regional networks and make use of new technologies to increase and speed communications across regions and reduce costs of technical assistance.

Progress is evident not just in these developments, but in the way we in the broader international community are approaching domestic election monitoring. It is fair to say that 15 years ago, NDI was something of a lone international voice noting the importance of domestic election monitoring. The UN Election Assistance Division was the first intergovernmental organization to step forward in vocal support for domestic monitors, which took place in Mexico's 1994 election, but it took some time before domestic monitors received the widespread recognition and support that we all accord to them today.

While this demonstrates substantial progress, at this juncture we still need to make a sustained commitment to these groups around the entire election cycle, so that they can:

- advocate for implementation of their recommendations and other electoral reforms;
- use their skills to expand systematic monitoring of other elements of the election cycle, such as setting election district boundaries, abuse of state resources for political advantage, financing of parties and election campaigns and political violence monitoring;
- expose wrongdoing by political contestants, as Alejandra's organization does in Colombia by publishing information on ties between certain candidates and narco-trafficking money and as Constine's group does in Romania by taking every candidate on each party's list and publishing information about any legal difficulties that person has encountered, concerning corruption or other crimes;
- engage in parliament monitoring by issuing scorecards and conducting other government accountability activities,
- and conduct the myriad of civil society strengthening activities that domestic election monitoring organizations otherwise undertake.

The activities of regional networks of parliamentarians, such as SADC Parliamentary Forum and activities of other regional bodies such as the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) are going to become more important for deepening democracy, as well as for reaching into authoritarian countries and offering solidarity and support for democratic activists.

Nora Schimming-Chase said on our first day that there cannot be democracy without democrats. These techniques are part of supporting and strengthening activists in political parties, parliaments and civil society to develop democratic values, institutions, processes and culture. They apply to strengthening democratic media. They are also applicable to engaging democrats in executive office and in civil service. The example that Dr. Afari-Gyan gave of the Association of African Election Administrators also illustrates this point.

To conclude, I do not subscribe fully to the notion that we are in a "democratic recession." The pace of democratic transitions slowed between 2000 and last year by many indicators, as Freedom House rankings indicate, but the slowing of economic growth is not a recession, nor is the slower growth of new democracies or the reversals in others. Democratic development has been deepening in many countries, such as Indonesia, Chile, South Africa and Poland, which are often cited as anchors for their regions, and it is deepening in many other places. The World Values survey indicates that the majority of people favor democratic government. And, we should note that those working to advance democratic development have also matured in attitude and techniques, as autocrats certainly have become more sophisticated.

Just as we should not have been overly euphoric in the early 1990s, we should not be too pessimistic now. As Maria Leissner suggested in our opening, we may be leaving a "backlash phase," and Asma Jahangir said at the opening that "the need for democracy is vital, urgent and now!" From different parts of the world we have heard similar messages.

I do not want to over-emphasize any one factor, but that the American people reached another benchmark in electing as President Barack Obama also provides inspiration to democratic activists around the globe and also to young people and children in many places. That he has set support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a priority for the United States government helps to produce a conducive environment for our efforts. This is true as well for the efforts within Europe,

evidenced at the Prague conference on “Building Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support” and Sweden’s commitment to continue this priority through its EU chairmanship.

More important, however, are the sustained efforts of democratic activists in so many countries, who as Asma said are campaigning not because any one else wants them to but because they demand and desire responsive, accountable governments that rest on the genuine will of the people and bring human dignity. We at this conference have willingly accepted the responsibility to offer then our solidarity and support. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate and attempt to contribute to this endeavor.

Thank you.