



**STATEMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND AT THE SIXTH
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEW OR RESTORED DEMOCRACIES
Doha, 30 October 2006**

Delivered by Mr. Magdy Martinez-Soliman, Executive Head a.i., UN Democracy Fund

Mr. Chairman, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the 6th International Conference on New or Restored Democracies for the first time since the United Nations Democracy Fund was created. It is also very timely to address the Conference in Doha, recognizing the strategic initiative taken by the State of Qatar and its leadership, to be the Arab world's firmest supporters of the UN initiatives aimed at democracy-building within and beyond the region. I would like to express our gratitude to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jasim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, 1st Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Qatar before the United Nations, and Member of the Board of the Democracy Fund, whose tireless support and guidance has opened up new opportunities for the UN to work in favour of Democracy at the global level.

As the statement of the Secretary-General reminded us yesterday, the United Nations has long worked to support democracy. And this lasting experience at the service of our Member States and inspired by our values, has led us today to create new and dynamic instruments that are already channels for democracy-building in numerous countries of the world. At the ICNRD, the Democracy Fund feels really at home. As a coordination mechanism within the UN system, we are accompanying the main UN bodies and Agencies, from the General Assembly to UNDP and the Department for Political Affairs, who have taken the lead in providing democracy assistance to Member States.

As a global partner, we come together in Doha with our friends and colleagues from International IDEA, from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and from other international NGOs who work for the same ideals. As a platform to support civil society, we have in this Conference numerous programme partners present who interpret, each one in their own way, according to their context and analysis, what democracy requires in their countries and regions. As a Fund created unanimously by the Heads of State and Government who signed the 2005 Summit Outcome Document, we are grateful to the 23 governments, from the East and West, the North and the South, who have made this initiative come true. I would like to reiterate here that Qatar has been and is one of our firmest supporters in this endeavour. Finally, as one of the instruments of the UN Reform, I would like to mention how pleased we are to get ready to work with the Peacebuilding Commission, whose Chair, His Excellency the Permanent representative of Angola before the United Nations, Ambassador Martins, honors us with his presence here today.

Six years ago, at the 4th ICNRD, the Secretary-General of the United Nations indicated (and I quote): “Democracy can only work if all groups in society feel that they belong to it, and that it belongs to them (...)” He then discussed the arguments according to which “Democracy begins with breakfast”, and “constitutional rights are a luxury which a poor country cannot afford”. He reminded us that “over and over again, we have learned that people’s stomachs are not filled by rulers who refuse to submit themselves to people’s judgement (...) Oppression is not an alternative to poverty, nor is development an alternative to freedom. Poverty and oppression go hand in hand, while true development means freedom from both.”

The ICNRD movement, with other global processes like the Community of Democracies, in which most of you participate, has contributed to widen acceptance of this vision within the international community. Our common aspiration is to make democratic values universal and democratic institutions a sine qua non condition for any State to be considered legitimate and modern. This requires support, and here is where the Democracy Fund is proving useful to democracy-building efforts.

Two months ago, the Secretary-General approved our first round of projects, funding the 125 best initiatives out of 1,300 concepts that had been submitted and starting to transfer US\$36 million to civil society organisations in 110 countries.

It will for instance monitor pro-poor public policies through a civil society network in seven Arab countries, support the Moroccan Truth Commission assessing the impact of past violence on women, assist Iraqi journalists to create their own and independent national news agency and set up the pilot civil and voter registry in Afghanistan. It will promote a democratic dialogue in several Arab countries at the request of their governments and their major political forces, under the auspices of the Club of Madrid. It will develop the capacity of newly elected Parliamentarians in countries like Bahrain and raise the political awareness amongst young people in Yemen. It will also promote the minority rights of Arab people living in Israel, develop the capacities of young political leaders in Palestine and help the Palestinian authority remain accountable and improve its integrity controls. I would like to herewith pay a tribute to the Foreign Minister Enkhbold of Mongolia and his team for his leadership in putting forward the MDG-9, an effort that builds on UNDP’s assistance to develop governance indicators in the country. The Democracy Fund is also supporting countries that develop “MDG-9s” or similar targets within their national strategies to promote or deepen democracy and human rights.

Half of the projects supported either strongly defend women’s rights or gender equality in their activities. We are trying to reinforce the message that democracy is not possible without women’s full and equal participation, and help transform it into action.

Democracy is a perfectible process and not a finish line at which some have arrived and many are still running towards. We are all in the same race, and would benefit from sharing our experience and knowledge. This is one more thing we hope to do together in this conference: learn from success and take lessons home from the past to build, each of us, our own future. As the Summit Outcome document says, “There is no single model of democracy; it does not belong to any country or region...”. The Foreign Minister of Qatar and the President of the General Assembly reiterated this idea of universalism yesterday. The good news is that Democracy is a global public good: it belongs to all of us and we can have it, if we collectively want to.

Thank you very much.