



**Remarks by Magdy Martinez-Soliman
United Nations Democracy Fund**

The relationship between the UN and ICNRD

**Expert Seminar on the Past, Present and Future of the New and Restored
Democracies Movement
Stockholm, 15-16 March 2007**

**Convened by
Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Swedish Parliament**

- Let me first of all thank the Swedish Riksdag and IPU for having convened this seminar and invited me to speak in this panel. We have been asked to discuss how the United Nations can engage more and better with the NRD Movement.
- At the conceptual level, coming back to basics, the United Nations and NRD share a common agenda of defining how democracy contributes to peace and of how democracy contributes to development; how democracy is the framework where Human Rights can actually happen best. .
- We have arrived at the conviction that there is nowadays no GDP line beneath which Democracy would not be affordable. Poverty is no excuse for tyranny if it ever were. We also know that freedom and democracy are not luxury items. Democracy is not only right: it actually works, in many places, to make the people's lives better.
- At a more operational level, the United Nations and the NRD movement also share the permanent awareness of the need for democracy activities to take place in a context of legitimacy and of universality. This awareness is based on the conviction that the role of the international community is a supporting role, one that consists in giving the means to domestic and regional actors to implement the goals that they have defined for themselves. In other words, regime change can only come from within.
- In a world where some are questioning the motives for democracy promotion, the reaffirmation of these two basic principles acquire a renewed relevance.

- In his 2005 report entitled “In larger Freedom”, Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that to advance a vision of larger freedom, the United Nations and its Member States must strengthen the normative framework that has been so impressively advanced over the last six decades. The ICNRD is making significant progress in further refining the normative framework in which democratic assistance takes place, widening acceptance of democratic governance around the world. It has now reached a critical stage, where it needs to move from declarations to implementation.
- Since its creation, the UN has been closely associated to the movement, assisting in both substantive and practical aspects of ICNRD and supporting it at the highest level. The UNDP, the Department of Political Affairs and the OHCHR have all been involved in trying to improve and strengthen the relationship between the UN and ICNRD.
- The UN Democracy Fund, established in 2005, provides another opportunity to offer more practical tools to implement several aspects of the ICNRD declarations. In particular, it offers the opportunity to strengthen a key component of democracy: participation.
- The Fund comes with the primary goal of promoting participation of civil society in political processes through the establishment of effective partnerships. The Fund is presently implementing its first round of activities, funding the 123 best projects out of 1,300 concepts that had been submitted. It is starting to transfer US\$36 million to civil society organisations in 110 countries. It is especially close therefore to the Parliamentary and CSO forums of the ICNRD.
- The Fund is thus an expression of the conviction of the need to focus on participation as the best way to balance the threats to democracy. Its very philosophy is that one of the biggest threats to democracy is actually exclusion, and that only by promoting inclusive political processes will the quality of democratic transitions increase.
- In a context where the legitimacy of some of the international activities to assist democracy is being questioned by some sectors, the best strategy to support democratization is to promote participation and the inclusion of a diversity of voices in political processes.
- We very much hope that the Fund will be able to assist in the implementation of the core principles and values of ICNRD at the local level, helping civil society organizations develop the appropriate mechanisms to strengthen human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law at the country or regional level.
- The tri-partite structure of ICNRD is an encouraging phenomenon that translates well the need for democracy activities to go beyond the purely governmental and

institutional realm. In this context, both the civil society and the parliamentary declaration and plan of action deserve support and should be seen as essential elements in the implementation of both ICNRD and UN values and principles.

- The context in which we participate in the NRD movement is one of fluent and excellent collaboration with the Community of Democracies, a useful forum that furthers the democracy-building agenda. We are of course also very comfortable in this other forum where we can engage, share and differ if necessary. It is indispensable to have a platform where to engage with those who are struggling, with those who are trying to design their transitions.
- The UN's engagement with the NRD should also be a two-way street. The movement and its representatives could for instance provide support to the efforts that the Secretary-General of the UN has deployed in Fiji, Thailand or Nepal.
- We are currently supporting the CoD's NGO forum. By the same token, and I turn here to our Board members who are in attendance, Benin, Chile and Qatar, we should be in a position of supporting the International Civil Society Forum for Democracy (ICSFD) of the ICNRD.
- I also found the idea of the CSOs establishing a Democracy Watch a very interesting one, that we could share with our Board as it gets more clearly defined, and eventually provide support to its development.
- I think we could also assist in facilitating the dialogue between the ICNRD and other groupings of Member States such as the Non-aligned Movement, the G8 and the G77, to mention a few that are not geographic.
- The United Nations is engaged in its own reform process, and UNDEF is a part of it. The reform aims at increased levels of efficiency in management. It also tries to increase the legitimacy of what we do and underscores the values that underpin our action. Here is where the Democracy Fund comes in: we clearly need more democracy within the UN, a better representation in the decision-making bodies than the one Yalta left us with. In the reform of the Security Council and the ECOSOC, I am sure that the NRD movement would have much to contribute from a democratic perspective.
- Beyond the UN's reform, the NRD partners may want to initiate a move in favour of "Democratic Globalisation", to reverse the trend by which more and more decisions affecting the peoples' lives are taken by invisible hands and non-elected powers who can't be held accountable, precisely by those peoples whose lives will be affected.
- Democracy still needs to be established or restored in several countries of the world. We may also want to think whether ICNRD stands for halving by 2015 the non-elected governments of the planet.

- Democracy needs finally to be protected from backsliding, erosion and trivialisation. We need to preserve its gains. In the context of current threats to security and peace posed by terror and aggression, democratic societies are the only response that elevates the security threshold without sacrificing liberty conquests.
- I would like to conclude on a more forward-looking note and ask that the UN and the NRD movement, the ICSFD and IPU, continue setting democratic standards for the international community, both the normative minimum and the normative optimum, while advocating in favour of the diversity of architecture to arrive at similar results: societies where voice and choice are respected, human rights protected and freedom is the default position.