

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO THE SEVENTH FORUM
ON DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND FREE TRADE
Doha, Qatar, 23 April 2007

Your Highness, [Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani]
President Halonen, [of Finland]
Mr. Straw, [Leader of the House of Commons, United Kingdom]
Mr. de Klerk, [former President of South Africa]
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted at this opportunity to address the Seventh Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade.

The name of this beautiful city where we are gathered is already associated in the minds of millions with the idea of free trade.

Qatar is also a welcome example of a country that understands the need to share the benefits of globalization and growth, and ensure that they contribute to social development.

And of course, Qatar has chaired the New and Restored Democracies' Movement since October 2006, has been a major contributor to the UN Democracy Fund, and has robustly supported freedom of the press.

For these reasons, and for his generous hospitality, I would like to pay tribute to His Highness, Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani. His leadership has opened new avenues for political participation in his country. Qatar is a fitting host for this important international forum.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The three topics that are our focus here today - democracy, development, and free trade - are closely related. I learned this as a South Korean. My country was known as one of the "Asian tigers" for our fast rate of industrialization and income growth. This growth was unleashed by a government that encouraged entrepreneurship, and it was fuelled, especially, by exports. In other words, trade. These were dynamic years, with ups and downs, in which Korea fashioned itself as a modern nation -- modern in every sense except for the lack of true democracy. That came later, as the result of additional struggles. And democracy has been at the core of the country's ability to sustain that progress.

These three phenomena are, for the most part, positively related.

Many studies have illustrated that ways in which democratic governance establishes greater institutional certainty, which in turn allows businesses to have greater confidence in a country's economic outlook. An investment, after all, is a bet on the future, and a bet is more secure if one can count on a certain amount of predictability.

The positive relationship between free trade and development is also well-established. With the ease of travel, shipping, and communications that our modern world provides, the benefits of trade have become more evident than ever. That is why it is so essential that there be a successful conclusion to the Doha round of trade talks. The global trading regime needs to create opportunities for the poorest countries instead of leaving them at a disadvantage.

Should this round of trade talks fail, serious damage will be done to those who can least afford it, to the multilateral trading system, and to multilateralism itself. Should this round of trade talks succeed, Doha will become synonymous not only with free trade, but also indelibly linked to development. Everyone must redouble their efforts in the coming months to ensure success.

As for the relationship between democracy and free trade, it has long been the case that exchanges of goods often become inseparable from exchanges of ideas. Moreover, the growing links among societies through trade gives each a stake in the overall political stability and well-being of others.

Democracy, development and free trade share a conception of men and women as free and autonomous individuals, capable of fulfilling their inner potential. The Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen, defines development largely in terms of the amount of freedom it gives individuals. Free trade, for its part, can be seen as the freedom to find a market for something that one has created, or to buy something that someone else has created, no matter how far away. Indeed, the instinct to barter is, like the instinct to be free, surely one of the oldest known to humankind.

But even as we stress the positive relationship between democracy, development and free trade, let us also affirm that democracy is intrinsically valuable on its own terms, regardless of its positive effect on trade and development.

An essential feature of democracy is a free press, able to perform its vital work of informing and educating the voting public without fear, harassment or censorship. Another is the separation of the powers, in which not all power is invested in a single institution or person. In order to function, a democratic government must engage in consultation. The process of holding elections widens and institutionalizes this consultation. It sends a message that men and women are not only political subjects but political actors and decision-makers.

The word "democracy" does not appear in the UN Charter, leading some to argue that the Organization has no role in promoting it. They might be right about the letters, but wrong about the spirit. The UN Charter is suffused with the quest for human dignity in all its aspects, and the Organization has a long history of working to realize every person's democratic rights. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- another core document that has shaped the UN's

identity – proclaims that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”.

Let us remember, too, that at its founding the United Nations had just 51 Member States. Today, after the great successes of the decolonization movement, there are 192. The vast majority of the additional members were once non-self-governing territories administered by some of the founders. The process by which they became independent was set out in Chapters X and XI of the Charter. And the justification for UN oversight of this process was the principle of self-determination, which is among the most basic expressions of democracy.

A different but related milestone in UN support for democracy was reached less than two months ago when we received the 100th request for UN electoral assistance. Over the past 15 years, the United Nations has become the world’s largest provider of democracy assistance. We have become experts in helping countries emerging from conflicts to build democratic institutions such as parliaments and electoral commissions. And we support efforts to strengthen judicial systems, local authorities and civil society.

UN support includes the Democracy Fund. Launched in 2005, the Fund works to strengthen the democratic fabric through alliances with Government, civil society and other partners. The first round of funding supported projects in 110 countries, with a majority focusing on women’s rights since democracy is not possible without women’s full and equal participation. Qatar has set an admirable example with its contributions to the Fund, and I hope other States will follow suit.

In undertaking these activities the United Nations is, of course, always respectful of domestic political and social dynamics, and provides assistance only when requested by the Government. We are also acutely aware of other sensitivities, including the suspicion that calls for democratic reform are simply a disguise for interference by one state in the affairs of another. Let us remember that democracy cannot be exported or imported; rather, it can only be supported, based on the yearning that springs from within each country. We should also recall, as stated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, that “there is no single model of democracy” and that democracy “does not belong to any single country or region”. The basic principles of democracy – equality, transparency, accountability, freedom of thought and expression – are universal. But the modalities will always vary from one country to another.

The private sector and civil society are also very important parts of the picture. The Global Compact corporate citizenship initiative works with business, labour groups and others to ensure respect for human rights, safe workplace conditions and environmental protection, and to fight corruption. The UN Office for Partnerships, for its part, offers another major gateway for engaging with business and others in supporting efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Excellencies,

Democracy is not a guarantee of success, either in formulating policies or implementing them. But it is without doubt our most powerful and just means for giving everyone a chance to be part of the debate, for resolving differences peacefully, and for building well-functioning

societies. It also means that those who make the decisions can be held accountable, and that people can correct their decisions through the electoral process.

I congratulate you for your sustained attention to these important questions. This is the seventh time you have met to advance the global discussion, and I am pleased to have had this opportunity to participate so early in my tenure.

Let us now proceed on three fronts at once.

- * Towards transparent governance and national institutions based on the will of the people.

- * Towards truly free trade.

- * And towards sustainable development and globalization that benefits all the world's people.

I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals and give life to these principles, and I wish you the best for a free and open debate in the days ahead.

Thank you.