

THE EMERGING DEMOCRACIES FORUM

With the rapid increase of globalization, the success or failure of a country's transition to a stable democracy and an open economic system takes on greater significance. Nevertheless, many countries have been struggling to make reforms with little or no support from the international community. What the leaders of these countries require is a chance to engage in an open dialogue with each other and with the international community about their countries' experiences, challenges and needs.

The National Democratic Institute and the government of Yemen created such a chance last June in Sana'a, Yemen, at a forum entitled "Managing the Twin Transitions: Political and Economic Reform in Emerging Democracies." The forum succeeded in bringing together political leaders—people like President Alpha Oumar Konare of Mali, Prime Minister Abdulkarin Al-Eryani of Yemen and speaker of Georgia's parliament Zurab Zhvania—as well as more than 160 other decision makers and key actors from the political, economic and society spheres. They were joined by over 50 donor representatives and experts.

Demonstrating remarkable unity, conference participants publicized their commitment to democratic principles through the Sana'a Declaration. The declaration serves not only as a pledge of these countries' commitment to democracy, but as a statement of why it is important that the international community support their efforts. The text of the declaration follows.

Sana'a Declaration

We who attended the Emerging Democracies Forum in Sana'a, Yemen, from June 27 to 30, 1999 from 16 countries, assembled to acknowledge our democratic achievements, to address common challenges we face in the transition to full democracy and to reaffirm our commitment to democratic rights and principles. The Forum was a unique gathering, bringing together a diverse group of participants from countries whose democratic advances are not well known.

We recognize that the transition process is not complete and that much needs to be done to consolidate our democratic systems and to implement further political and economic reforms. While we are proud to have joined the growing community of democracies, the international community has tended to focus on countries that are considered strategically more important or are in crisis. However, democratic progress in our states contributes to peace, stability and prosperity both within and beyond our borders.

Reflecting the importance of all sectors of society in this endeavour, the participants at the Forum included government officials, members of governing and opposition parties, and representatives of labor, business and civic groups from Benin, Bolivia, El Salvador, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Macedonia, Malawi, Mali, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, and Yemen. We represent a diversity of democratic experience, but our attendance at this Forum demonstrates the univer-

sality of the democratic idea. This group of nations with different traditions, cultures and historical experiences was brought together by a shared commitment to democracy and a belief that the promise of economic prosperity enjoyed by all citizens is more likely to be realized in a democratic environment based on respect for human rights, popular participation and the rule of law. We share a commitment to:

- pursue economic reforms and secure fundamental workers' rights, while making every effort to educate and build widespread consensus for these goals;
- improve protections for human rights for all our people;
- hold regular free and fair elections, with special attention to the need to build public confidence in the process;
- develop our legislatures as an essential instrument for broad public participation and representation, as well as for policy debate and oversight of government;
- empower democratic governance at local levels;
- deepen our commitment to, and implement measures to ensure, the full participation of women in political life;
- ensure that the rights of minorities are respected and that every effort is made to engage marginalized groups in the political process;
- broaden the democratic experience by adopting all reasonable means to encourage public access to, and participation in, the policymaking process;

- support the strengthening of civil society;
- uphold the freedom of the press;
- address the urgent challenge of corruption by instituting meaningful reforms, including those that increase governmental transparency; and
- foster judicial independence, enhance public access to legal redress and ensure that the laws are fairly applied to all.

Following are some examples of measures recommended by Forum participants that give concrete expression to our shared democratic principles.

The successful implementation of economic reforms is advanced by:

- transparent and inclusive decision making, the involvement of civil servants, the public, labor, business groups, and political parties in the design and implementation of reforms;
- a social safety net to meet basic human needs and/or a complementary poverty alleviation program; and
- a recognition of the role of the civic sector in the implementation of economic reforms, including the use of such groups to help deliver government-funded social services.

Public confidence in elections is enhanced by:

- working toward the establishment of independent election commissions that are nonpartisan or politically balanced;
- regulating, by legislation, government financing of elections to ensure that they are fair and equitable for all parties; and

- inviting election observers, whether domestic or international, to mount more comprehensive efforts, including the monitoring of registration and campaign periods.

The legitimacy of parties and legislatures is advanced by:

- the adoption by political parties of internal democratic procedures, ongoing training of political leaders and elected officials, and public accountability and transparency; and
- the implementation of legislative procedures that ensure public access to plenary and committee meetings, the holding of public hearings, and the provision of committee documents and bills to the public.

Public participation in democratic decision making is enhanced by:

- providing for private ownership of the media and ensuring the impartiality of state-owned media;
- ensuring that governments and political parties take measures to increase the number of women in parliament and appoint women to key government posts;
- conducting civic education in schools, nongovernmental organizations, parties, and the media to address cultural, attitudinal and legal barriers to the political and economic participation of women; and
- encouraging governments and legislatures to enhance the viability of nongovernmental organizations, including removing legal barriers and providing tax exempt status.

The achievement of good governance, the improvement of ad-

ministration, controlling corruption and strengthening the rule of law can be advanced by:

- instituting public information mechanisms, such as freedom of information laws and the publication of regulations;
- depoliticizing and professionalizing the civil service; and
- implementing a comprehensive program to fight corruption, including institutions such as politically independent anti-corruption commissions, ombudsmen and auditors general, codes of conduct and financial disclosure rules, and open procurement processes.

As a result of this conference, we hope to establish mechanisms between our countries to continue the sharing of ideas and experiences through consultations, exchange programs, an interactive web site and other means. We also look forward to working together in a variety of international fora to promote democratic principles and practices.

The international community should renew its commitment to countries working to build democratic institutions and processes and dedicate the resources for this task. In particular, the donor community and the international financial institutions, in considering loans, aid and debt policy, should give priority to those countries implementing political as well as economic reforms. These political reforms include measures that advance popular participation, build public trust in elections and legislatures, and enhance government transparency and accountability. 