



Annual Democracy Forum

“Learning from Democratic Transitions in Asia and the Pacific:

An Inter-Generational Dialogue”

25-26 August, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Synthesis by Secretary General Yves Leterme

Distinguished Participants of the Forum,

I have the honour to deliver a synthesis of the Annual Democracy Forum 2016, where two keynote speakers and seventeen panelists have expressed their views and shared their experiences over five sessions in these past one and a half days. Commendations to the moderators who had ably extracted the vast knowledge and perspectives from our speakers.

As the Foreign Minister of Mongolia explained yesterday, the theme of this year’s Annual Democracy Forum is Learning from Democratic Transitions: An Intergenerational Dialogue. In this Forum, we have witnessed exchanges not only between the younger and the older generations from a personal point of view, but also between the younger and older democracies. Views of the young brought fresh ideas into the older generation’s minds, while the younger democracies reflected upon the experiences and challenges faced by the older democracies in their transitions to democracy.

To come back to the different panels, I would say that transitions require high quality constitutions. Democratic transitions more often than not require constitutional reform. Asia and the Pacific countries such as the Philippines, Mongolia, Indonesia, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Fiji and most recently, Thailand, changed their constitutions to give way to their new democratic systems. These constitutional changes were essential to give way to the establishment of institutions and processes under a new democratic system.

We learnt again that constitution building is a slow and gradual process. Panelists of this Forum have testified different paces and processes in their respective countries. They observed that it is important to ensure wide consultations took place with the people. Open discussions should take place with different groups that bring their specific perspectives and interests, thus allowing the constitution to have accommodated the different views. Rushing promulgation of the constitution may put the transitional process to a halt due to significant opposition. Given the slow and gradual process, some countries opted to create interim constitutions allowing the country to continue being governed under transitional arrangements.

During this sometimes long transitional period, peace and security in the country is of paramount importance. During such a period, the country is in a vulnerable state when the future of the country is being written, sometimes with a lot of tension. Both state and non-state security sector support are crucial towards ensuring a smooth democratic transition. Panelists from Nepal, Indonesia and Fiji shared their perspectives on how the security sectors in their respective countries acted during the transitional period. The Forum here observed that the military's support or at least, non-opposition, was helpful in allowing the transition to move forward into more advanced stages.

In Nepal, neither the military nor the Maoist fighters won the war. Henceforth, both agreed to support the transition into democracy with the downfall of the monarchy.

The military of Indonesia had started its own reform, gradually withdrawing itself from politics before political reform was concluded. When the democratic transition started, the military was already in place, both physically and mentally, to support it. Fiji's recent return to democracy has been different. In history of Fiji, elections were followed by ineffective governance, followed by coup, followed by elections and then another coup, with the cycle continuing and Fiji's overall situation worsening. However, it was the military that drove the process of general elections taking place in September 2014, and we hope that the situation is now stabilizing and the democratic transition moving forward. In many Asian countries, it has taken repeated confrontations over several years between democratic governments and elements of the armed forces and/or police to firmly, some highly visible, others not- to firmly establish civilian control. All of these experiences we discussed, however, showed how security forces have been enablers and played a constructive role in transitions, which should not be underestimated.

The bottom-up drive towards democracy was also examined at this Forum. Experiences in Mongolia, the Philippines and Indonesia had shown that social movements resulted in the downfall of the authoritarian regime and paved the way to democracy. Leaders have also emerged from these movements, but the experiences of entering into politics have been mixed, we learnt. Most of the times, social movements could not turn into political parties, thus allowing existing political elites to continue their power after democracy was formally installed. At times, individual movement leaders became political leaders, however, other problems emerged. The panel concerned also discussed some of the dilemmas social movements confront. Is it a role of social movement leaders to get involved in political formal processes, for instance, and if they indeed do so, what is the price to pay, both at the individual level as well as for the movements themselves? The Panel

also discussed the negative influence of money in politics. More there are elections, more expensive democracy becomes in many countries.

In Mongolia, social movement leaders also became prominent politicians. Mongolia's transition process was therefore smooth and consistent, albeit a bit slow. Democratic leaders were also able to provide the right environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) to nurture. Based on a study, Mongolia's CSOs are maturing. However, financial resources for CSOs are scarce and are sometimes being taxed like corporations. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed to achieve sustainable democracy in Mongolia. The willingness of leaders to converse with CSOs and the people are encouraging and crucial, however, the CSOs require better environment to continue their existence sustainably.

As with anything that happens in life, both men and women play a part in democratic transitions. A session of this Forum was therefore dedicated to examine the role of women in democratic transitions. While traditionally, men dominates political power in many Asia and the Pacific countries, particularly under authoritarian regimes, transitions to democracy have provided more opportunities for women to take part in the democratic processes. More women participate in elections, both as candidates and as independent voters, although it is still a long way towards equal participation. Women participate in the peace process in the Philippines, for example. More women hold high-level government, legislative or judiciary positions. The principle of gender equality enshrined in democracy has helped provide more opportunities for women to become leaders.

All of the country experiences showed the need to provide specific measures, be it legal or educational, to enable more women to be represented in democratic institutions and processes. Countries like Nepal and Indonesia, quota for women in parliament and on candidates' lists exist respectively. In Fiji, traditionally, women have no space in dialogues and other public discussion fora, thus requiring the

creation of new spaces. The rise of CSOs plays an important role in supporting this effort as the Mongolian experience has also showed. In the Philippines, women have played important roles in the transition and therefore, have opened the eyes of the people on the capabilities of women that in other countries are sometimes being underestimated. Continued challenges are indeed observed in the Forum where the legal and educational measures are still insufficient. The concepts of gender mainstreaming and gender equality are still new and hence, require awareness rising among the people. The capacity of women in certain contexts is still required to be developed, including in bearing the expense of running in elections as Indonesia experiences. And, the willingness of women to participate and to support affirmative action needs to be enhanced as Bhutan has observed.

Finally, we live in a globalized world where democracies help each other during transitions. Indeed, intergovernmental organisations such as International IDEA, the United Nations, the Community of Democracies and the OSCE, are mandated by its member states to provide support and assistance to countries in democratic transitions. The international community, while it should acknowledge that transitions into democracy is a bitter and divisive process where elections are often the trigger of conflict, the international community should help ensure that the sharing of common values and the development of capacities will overcome the potential relapse that can occur.

International organisations, we heard, can provide technical advice and sophisticated comparative knowledge to a country as well as fully supporting the country's first elections, but in the long run, the overall impact depends on national ownership and the preparedness of the national authority to embrace this. The national leaders and authorities should be invested in democracy from the start. As consequence, partnership building between international and national institutions from the very beginning is essential with a good understanding of each others' roles.

Let me end this synthesis with these five conclusionary statements:

1. Contrary to common expectations, transition to democracy is a slow and gradual process with constitutional changes and elections as important initial milestones, but surely not the only ones.
2. The security sector is considered as enablers and therefore has a constructive role in democratic transitions.
3. Social movements are catalysts towards democracy and produce democratic leaders, but there are questions to sustainability, thus more support is needed.
4. Women as well as men have vital roles to play in ensuring successful democratic transitions and more support is required to achieve more balanced positions.
5. International and national actors should understand each others' roles and the limits of those roles in providing support and assistance. A clear understanding on the bones and banes to the transition is a prerequisite to sustainable democracy support that should always be based on domestic ownership and sustainability.

On this positive note, I would like to express my thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia for their efforts and commitments in making this Annual Democracy Forum possible and to the NAM Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation along with other partners. Last but not least, my sincere thanks to the young people that managed the catering, that handed out the materials or that made sure the microphones were working. All of them ensured that we all could focus on the substantive discussions at this Forum.

THANK YOU