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The Challenges and Future of Democracy in Africa

A Keynote Address

Delivered by

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Chairperson of the African Union Commission

During the

^{44TH}
**XLIV OAS Lecture of the Americas: "Inter-Regional Dialogue on
Democracy: Celebrating Ten Years of the Inter-American Democratic
Charter"**

On Friday 15 April 2011

At the

OAS Hall of the Americas

Check against Delivery

**H.E. Jose Miguel Insulza,
Secretary General of the OAS
Ambassador Gillian M.S. Bristol,
Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of
Grenada to the OAS
H.E. Vidar Helgesen,
Secretary General of International IDEA**

**Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am honoured to take part in this year's Lecture of the Americas on Regional Perspectives on Democracy: Celebrating Ten Years of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, organised by our sister Organisation, the Organisation of American States (OAS). I was glad to answer the call by the Secretary-General whose organisation, the OAS, stands as a beacon of hope and has always been a fountain of solidarity.

This event is of particular importance, as it comes after the 16th African Union (AU) Summit on the theme "Towards Greater Unity and Integration through Shared Values." In dedicating the theme of the 16th Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government to Shared Values in Africa, including identifying obstacles and measures to be adopted to facilitate continental integration based on such values, African leaders decided that deliberations on how Democracy and Governance can accelerate

continental integration and provide a solid foundation for building a more prosperous Africa are needed. The consensus that emerged from the Summit is that Africa's destiny will be shaped by how much Africa constructs a sense of common identity based, not on the narrow lenses of state, race or religion, but constructed on Africa's belief in Democracy and Governance as well as unity, as the most viable policy option to mediate, reconcile and accommodate our individual and collective interests.

Against this backdrop, and in a context where the universality of Democracy and Governance as shared values is unquestionable, we must recognise the value of experience sharing in democracy promotion. Our presence here today signifies more than our collective commitment to the principles of Democracy and Governance. It indeed highlights our collective resolve to be our neighbours' keeper. Success would not be measured by individual progress, but by a matter of collective gain. In this process of dialogue and experience sharing, I am confident, that we are responding directly to the needs of "democratic transitionalism" accelerated by information technology and built upon our common heritage and the principles of solidarity.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Along Africa's democratization journey, events in North Africa, despite providing hope and mixed results, reminds us that no matter the difference in the colour of our eyes, skin, religion, wealth and geography, we all do yearn for liberty and equality, something more consequential and bigger than "big and strong men". Most importantly, these events have proved that democracy is good politics. What are the possibilities of the contagion effect of the situation in North Africa and what policies can the AU develop to respond to the situations? Do these events mark the end of the history of the political evolution in Africa? While not entirely neglecting these very important questions, I would like to address my mind to the broader Democracy and Governance challenges facing Africa and the role of the AU in addressing them.

The principal governance challenge facing Africa is how to enhance a self-nourishing relationship between authority, accountability and responsibility. This is important in reconstituting African politics from being a zero sum to a positive sum game, characterized by reciprocal behaviour and legitimate relations between the governors and the governed.

Democracy building and consolidation is contingent on strong institutions. Democracy and elections are processes, not events, and the key element in building democratic culture in Africa is anchoring the ongoing practices in unambiguous and predictable processes and strong institutions supported by popular participation. The challenges of electoral conflicts and political violence reflect the problems of transitions to democracy associated with managing elections and building institutions of competition that are widely accepted by winners and losers. Building strong institutions and political processes, such as election, is critical in ensuring that if a politician loses today, it will be rational and cost effective for him to trust the political system to afford him another chance in the future. Institutions that get involved in elections and other political processes exhibit weaknesses, e.g. Election Management Bodies some of which lack capacity, public trust and legitimacy. Political parties have weak internal processes, including lack of internal democratic system, and inter-party relations are acrimonious. Civil Society involvement in the electoral cycle is also weak.

Democracy is much more than electing leaders periodically through competitive elections. It is about acceptance of a culture that institutionalizes certain basic freedoms and liberties: freedom of association, assembly, expression of ideas and political

organization; and property rights. Democracy is about affording the individual the possibility and hope of change, that is, change they can trust in. In this regard, Constitution and constitutionalism in Africa need to be strengthened. Civilian control of the security apparatus of the state and peaceful constitutional transfer of power need to be promoted and encouraged. The promotion and protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights, taking into account their universality, interdependence and indivisibility, is imperative. Popular participation must therefore be encouraged. There is need for legislative and administrative measures to guarantee the rights of women, ethnic minorities and others.

As much as democracy is an end in itself, it is also a means to an end. When access and control of state power becomes the only viable mode of resource accumulation and distribution, election becomes “war by other means” amongst the political elite. There is need for improved service delivery and socio-economic development to boost confidence in democratic institutions and to reverse election fatigue.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Since the establishment of the African Union, AU Member States have demonstrated a commitment towards a regional and

collective approach to democracy building and consolidation. As a result, in matters of Democracy and Governance, the AU has a broad mandate to facilitate the emergence of the necessary environment to engender democracy in Member States. In responding to this mandate, the AU has established the African Governance Architecture as the overall political and institutional framework to facilitate and promote governance. The Architecture constitutes a set of legal instruments and institutions which seek to complement, encourage and coordinate efforts by Member States towards Democracy building and consolidation.

At the heart of the AU efforts toward Democracy promotion, building and consolidation, is the African Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections that was adopted by AU Heads of State and Government in 2007. The Charter is one of the clearest and most decisive indicators of AU Member States' collective commitment to non-indifference, Democracy and good Governance. The Charter provides Member States with a collective vision and a reference point for democracy building and consolidation. Most importantly, it provides the basis to enhance the capacity of AU to respond to potential threats to governance, such as the resurgence of coups and unconstitutional changes of government.

Whilst the evolving African Governance Architecture reflects progress achieved at the continental level, embodied within the regional approach to democracy promotion, building and consolidation, are challenges relating to the adequacy of the frameworks, institutional constraints, the pace of implementation, the capacity to implement, the efficacy of the institutional and effective coordination. In appreciating these challenges and the urgency to confront them, the 18th Ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union (AU) declared 2012 as the Year of Shared Values. The Executive Council further requested the Commission to: undertake periodic reviews and coordinate the monitoring of compliance to AU instruments on Shared Values by Member States; put in place measures and modalities to support Member States to establish the required capacities and processes for collectively securing and consolidating Democracy and Governance in Africa.

This decision is part of a policy orientation to focus the operational and programmatic interventions of the AU within the realm of Democracy and Governance from norm-setting and institutional building towards consolidation and implementation. Thus, the year of Shared Values offers the AU a unique opportunity to reinforce deeper commitment and establish a compact between African leaders and their citizens in mobilising

the African peoples towards achieving the shared vision of continental integration and unity.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

As we reflect on the role of regional organizations in promoting democracy, it must be stated that, that role must be that of support. The role of regional organizations is not to bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being by bequeathing them civilization. Regional organizations must not arrogate to themselves the prerogative to export or impose values and practices. Thus, even as there is an emerging consensus on the principle of the Responsibility to Protect as embodied in article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU, the principle should not be perceived as opening the floodgate for “humanitarian intervention”, which is coercive military intervention for humanitarian purposes. Responsibility to Protect is about effective preventive action based on the principle of “sovereignty as a responsibility”.

Democracy building should be a consented indigenous process driven, shaped and influenced by the principal beneficiaries. In this regard, a regional approach to democracy

promotion, at least from an African perspective, is not a panacea to the governance challenges facing the continent. As such, the African Governance Architecture should be seen as providing an opportunity to engage and develop appropriate capacity and responses to Africa's governance challenges. A coordinated and integrated approach is no substitution for the primary responsibility of AU Member States in democracy, governance and human rights. The Architecture is premised on complementing the primary responsibility of States and the need to engage with the global political community.

In a globalising world where policy is increasingly being made at multilateral fora, I cannot but argue that addressing Africa's governance challenges is the primary but not the sole responsibility of the African Union and its Members States. (As we

engage with our external partners, we must recognise that the outcomes that we establish from our engagements are not, in essence, collective outcomes, but are reflections of the power asymmetric of the "partnerships"). The marginalisation of Africa in

important multilateral fora such as the United Nations Security Council is evidence that while there is wide recognition that we live in a time and a world where the governance values we espouse are intertwined with the values and rights of all others across the globe, enhancing Africa's voice in multilateral

institutions is important in moving forward the continent's governance agenda. The full impact of the African Governance Agenda will never materialise in so far as Africa is at the periphery of the global governance architecture.

As I conclude, allow me to restate the following issues that are of primary importance to the AU Commission and which I would like us to reflect upon: Firstly, one of the major opportunities to address Africa's governance challenges is enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of collective response. It is important that we give the 2012 as the year of Shared Values in Africa some operational importance by individually and collectively supporting the African Governance Agenda. Secondly reforming the global governance architecture, such as the UNSC, is imperative in optimising AU response to addressing governance challenges; and *thirdly* what can the AUC learn from other regional organizations in the promotion of democracy building and consolidation?

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the OAS for its tireless contribution to the Pan African Agenda. In expressing my, and indeed, the AU Commission's appreciation for the kindness and hospitality offered by OAS, , allow me to restate the determination of the AU Commission to work with all Member

States and partners as ^{we}~~they~~ seek to take the African Governance agenda to another level.

I will end by congratulating the OAS as you celebrate ten years of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. I have no doubt that since the Charter came into being, the Americas have not been the same. We in Africa believe that when the African Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections come into force, Africa too will change!

I thank you for your attention.

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