



Fifty-fourth session

Agenda item 39

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

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Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 50/133 of 20 December 1995, 51/31 of 6 December 1996, 52/18 of 21 November 1997, and 53/31 of 23 November 1998, the General Assembly welcomed the four reports of the Secretary-General on the ways in which the United Nations system could support the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies (A/50/332 and Corr.1, A/51/512, A/52/513, A/53/554 and Corr.1). The Assembly commended the activities undertaken at the request of Governments to support the efforts to consolidate democracy, as reflected in the Secretary-General's four reports. The Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to improve the capacity of the Organization to respond effectively to the requests of Member States in their efforts towards democratization.

2. In its resolution 53/31, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its fifty-fourth session, a report on the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request. It describes the activities that have taken place in 1998-1999 in the follow-up process to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (see A/53/554 and Corr.1, chap. II). It also looks more generally at the efforts of the United Nations system in that field, reviews the overall process of democratization and the role that the international conferences of new or restored democracies and the United Nations have played in that global process.

II. Recent activities of the follow-up mechanism to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies

3. In its resolution 51/31, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, Member States and appropriate specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations to cooperate in the holding of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development. The Conference was held in Bucharest from 2 to 4 September 1997. As described in my report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session (A/53/554 and Corr.1), the Conference was successful in bringing together participants from all parts of the international community and civil society and recommended that a

mechanism, including representatives of Governments, the United Nations system and civil society, should be established to follow up on its results.

4. Since the Conference, the Government of Romania (the current chair of the international conferences) has continued to play a leading role in the follow-up process. The participants in the follow-up mechanism are representatives from interested countries, in particular those involved in organizing the international conferences of new or restored democracies (Benin, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Romania), the United Nations system, academia and non-governmental organizations. The main purpose of the follow-up mechanism is to implement the recommendations of the Bucharest Conference, to plan for the coming conferences and to assist in promoting communication on and better understanding of the challenges and prospects of democratization.

5. The follow-up mechanism continued to meet in 1998 and 1999 in New York. A third "democracy forum" was organized at the United Nations on 22 March 1999. The theme of the meeting was the development of democracy in Albania and a presentation was made by the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament. Members of permanent missions, Secretariat staff and representatives of non-governmental organizations were invited to participate.

6. The Government of Romania hosted an expert meeting in Bucharest on 17 and 18 May 1999 as part of the follow-up process. The meeting discussed the United Nations assistance to Governments in the area of democratization and good governance; the analysis of the list of indicators for the evaluation of national progress in strengthening democracy; and the detailed preparations for the Fourth International Conference, to be held in Benin in December 2000.

7. At the meeting in May 1999, Romania also introduced the first draft of a code of democratic conduct. The follow-up mechanism discussed the draft and amended it. As requested by the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations, the revised draft was published as an official document of the General Assembly on 27 July 1999 (A/54/178, annex).

III. Preparations for the Benin Conference of New or Restored Democracies

8. In its resolution 53/31, the General Assembly encouraged Member States to promote democratization and

to make additional efforts to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, noting with satisfaction that the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies would be held in Cotonou in the year 2000 and stressing the importance of support by Member States, the United Nations system, the specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations for the holding of the Fourth International Conference.

9. In June 1999, the President of Benin established a national preparatory committee for the planning and organization of the Conference. It was decided that the theme of the Conference would be "Democracy, Peace, Security and Development". A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) expert team visited Cotonou from 23 to 28 August 1999 to help the Government of Benin prepare a project document on the Conference. The initial plans were approved in September 1999 by both UNDP and the host Government.

10. The Government of Benin intends to organize, in cooperation with international organizations, interested partners and other African countries, four preparatory meetings in Africa that will focus on the theme of the Conference. Two special events — a forum for youth and a civil society forum — will be held immediately preceding the Conference. Regional conferences or seminars will also be organized on lessons learned about democratic transition in various parts of the world.

11. Many donor countries, United Nations agencies and international organizations (such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Organization of la Francophonie) have already committed themselves to contribute substantively to the preparatory process and the organization of the Conference. The Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies is scheduled for the first week of December 2000. The Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations will be the focal point in New York for the coordination of the preparatory process, assisted by the follow-up mechanism.

IV. The United Nations and the international conferences of new or restored democracies: an interim review

12. The countries that consider themselves new or restored democracies have now been meeting for 12 years. For the first time, an African country will be the host of the

international conference. At the dawn of the third millennium, and with Africa completing the cycle of conferences to be held on the four continents, it is timely to assess the overall impact of the movement on the process of global democratization, in particular in view of the preparatory process for the Benin Conference in December 2000.

A. Developments within the framework of the international conferences of new or restored democracies

1. International conferences

13. The first international conference was held in Manila in 1988, followed by conferences held in Managua in 1994 and in Bucharest in 1997. The number of countries attending the conferences has increased from 13 in Manila to some 80 in Bucharest. During the period of the general debate in the General Assembly, two additional ministerial meetings took place in New York as part of the follow-up mechanism, the first in September 1996 and the second in September 1998. The reports and documents of the three conferences were made available to the international community. More efforts could be undertaken to distribute them widely among delegations, governmental officials, scholars, journalists and non-governmental organizations, since the results of the conferences are still not known to the public at large.

2. The reports of the Secretary-General, General Assembly resolutions and other official documents

14. Prior to the present report, four reports of the Secretary-General on support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies have been issued (see para. 1 above). Five resolutions have been adopted by the General Assembly, at its forty-ninth to fifty-third sessions. Other United Nations documents have been issued under the same item, most recently the Code of Democratic Conduct (A/54/178, annex). In addition, on 20 December 1996, my predecessor issued a companion volume to his report of 18 October 1996 (A/51/512), which was later published as an agenda for democratization (see A/51/761). It has been distributed widely and is still by far the most well-known of the reports of the Secretary-General on the subject.

3. Inventory of the activities of the United Nations system

15. The Secretariat has conducted two comprehensive reviews of ways and mechanisms by which the United Nations system could support the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/30 of 7 December 1994. The 1995 review was undertaken through interviews that encouraged United Nations departments and agencies to reflect on their role in democracy-building (the results of the study were published in the report of the Secretary-General of 7 August 1995 (A/50/332 and Corr.1)). The 1998 review elicited written responses to a letter sent to departments and agencies by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. In the preparatory process, the Advisory Committee on Coordination discussed the matter and agreed to designate focal points who would facilitate the responses and participate in the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General of 29 October 1998 on new or restored democracies (A/53/554 and Corr.1).

16. It seems beneficial to conduct a periodic evaluation of the work of United Nations departments and agencies in the field of democratization. Enough time should be left between reviews, however, to let new developments evolve. In the interim, efforts will be made to engage departments and agencies more deeply in sharing their experiences in democracy-building, for instance, through joint seminars and projects.

4. The creation of the follow-up mechanism to the international conferences

17. The creation of the follow-up mechanism, as discussed in more detail in section II of this report, was an innovative idea that brought Governments, the United Nations system, academia and civil society organizations together to implement the objectives of the Bucharest Conference and to plan for the Benin Conference. Since its inception, members of the follow-up mechanism have held a series of meetings to advance concrete projects, reporting their results to the General Assembly. The mechanism is open-ended and transparent, welcoming new members. It is hoped that it will facilitate preparations for the Benin Conference in 2000.

5. Seminars and forums

18. A first civil society forum was held at the Conference in Bucharest in September 1997. A summary of the forum, entitled "The Role of Civil Society in the Process of

Democratization", is contained in the report *Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development* (Bucharest, 1997), a publication sponsored by UNDP. This type of civil society forum will be repeated and expanded at the Benin Conference.

19. In addition, separate democracy forums have been held during sessions of the General Assembly in New York. The forums have facilitated discussions and allowed heads of State, parliamentarians and other eminent personalities to express their views and to share experience relevant to democratization. Other seminars and workshops have also been held in order to assist in the preparation process for the international conferences.

6. Democracy Web site and networking

20. The follow-up mechanism agreed in 1998 that a special United Nations Web site on democratization and good governance should be established. UNDP and the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat subsequently established inter-linked sites within their home pages.¹ The sites will be further developed in order to fulfil their role in informing users of the reports, events and projects contemplated or completed under the umbrella of the follow-up mechanism.

21. The discussions in the conferences, forums and seminars, as well as in the General Assembly, have engaged many politicians, diplomats, governmental officials, international civil servants, scholars and representatives of non-governmental organizations in joint projects and deliberations. Electronic networks of the "friends of democracy" have been created. A group of practitioners and scholars from Finland, Romania and the United Kingdom established the Network Institute for Global Democratization in 1998. This virtual institute meets and operates through the Internet to promote open debate and concrete projects on democratization. Such electronic networking is expected to spread in the coming years.

7. New concepts, ideas and initiatives

22. A viable international movement should be able to create ideas, concepts and approaches, eventually leading to their concrete application, as well as to provoke discussion, even on controversial themes. A much debated document has been my predecessor's proposal for an agenda for democratization (see A/51/761). Its call for the democratization of international relations and the United

Nations has provoked strong reactions. Other themes, such as the contribution of civil society and private sector to the democratization process, have broadened the scope of debate on the matter.

23. Other concepts in the reports of the Secretary-General have been a comprehensive notion of democratization as a process — a goal to be achieved rather than a model to be imposed, the discussion of the role of women in furthering democratization and a proposal that a joint “democratization and governance agenda” could provide an opportunity to bridge a gap between the development and peace agendas of the United Nations. The reports of the three conferences as well as the reports of the Secretary-General have provided many other recommendations both as policy suggestions and guidelines for operations. The monitoring of their implementation since the follow-up mechanism was instituted in 1998 has given it a more practical character.

B. Other developments in building democracy

24. Many developments other than those directly related to new or restored democracies have taken place both within the United Nations and outside the Organization during the same period, considerably strengthening the overall process of democratization in the world.

25. Within the United Nations, a number of resolutions or declarations have been adopted in connection with various aspects of democratization. At its 57th meeting, on 27 April 1999, the Human Rights Commission adopted resolution 1999/57, entitled “Promotion of the right to democracy”. Every second year, the General Assembly has adopted a resolution on electoral assistance based on the Secretary-General’s report on enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections. As early as 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna examined the linkages between democracy, development and human rights. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action² stated that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

26. Other international organizations have also taken measures or supported norms, guidelines and legal instruments in the field of democracy. In 1997 the Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy that set out the basic principles of democracy and the elements and standards for the exercise

of democratic government. Among international institutes, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, based in Stockholm, has worked on many aspects of democratization. At the regional level, such institutes as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Unit for Promotion of Democracy of the Organization of American States have been established. At the national level, there has also been a growth of national institutes or research centres devoted to promoting or studying democracy and its many components.

27. The body of academic literature on democracy has been growing. Over recent years there has been a most lively debate on the so-called “democratic peace”, that is, that democracies rarely go to war against each other and have low levels of internal violence compared with non-democracies. Another debate deals with the linkages between development and democracy, including the question of whether a democratic government promotes economic growth and development more effectively than other forms of government.

28. The concept of governance is also very much related to democracy. In my report of 21 October 1997 to the General Assembly on new or restored democracies (A/52/513), I stated that all the principles of good governance also reflected the fundamental principles of a democratic society. The programmes of governance within the United Nations system are greatly expanding. More than 50 per cent of UNDP programmes, for instance, are already devoted to governance and related projects, a trend that is likely to continue in the future.

29. The rapid waves of democratic transformations that occurred in the 1970s, 1980s and in particular in the early 1990s have levelled off. During recent years the democratic process has been consolidated, including continuous assistance by the international community to democratization and governance, as well as the emergence of new initiatives for international norms supporting democratization in various parts of the world. The continuation of global democratization is not necessarily assured, however. In a most timely initiative, the Summit of the Organization of African Unity in Algiers in July 1999 decided that leaders of military regimes would no longer be accepted at summit meetings of the Organization (decision AHG/Dec.142 (XXXV) (see A/54/424)).

30. The importance of the international conferences of new or restored democracies has been as a forum for creating policies and norms. The Conferences are the most

visible manifestation of an open-ended process that brings together government representatives, United Nations officials, scholars and non-governmental organizations.

31. Other initiatives are also under way for the promotion of democratization. For instance, the World-wide Movement for Democracy held its first conference in New Delhi in February 1999 and the Emerging Democracies Forum met in Sana'a in June 1999. It is hoped that the Benin Conference will discuss the future direction and priorities of the international conferences of new or restored democracies and will examine imaginative ways and means to cooperate with other initiatives to strengthen democratic transformation throughout the world.

V. Observations and recommendations

32. In my report of 13 April 1998, on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318), I argued that democratization helped to guarantee political rights, protect economic freedoms and create an environment where peace and development could flourish. In my progress report of 25 September 1999 on the implementation of the recommendations in the Africa report (S/1999/1008), I once again stressed the links between democratization, political rights, economic freedoms and development. The two reports reflect the interest of the United Nations, Governments and civil society in addressing the causes of conflict and in promoting development and the process of democratization in Africa as a priority concern for the international community.

33. In view of the heightened interest in promoting the success of democracy in Africa, the Benin Conference planned for 2000 — the first worldwide ministerial meeting on the African continent on the subject — has the potential to offer not only a global platform for the strengthening of democratic transformation, but also a welcome opportunity to draw attention to democratic experience and its prospects and challenges in Africa.

34. In that light, it is proposed that:

Recommendation 1

All segments of international, regional and national communities should be encouraged to contribute to the Benin Conference, including Governments, the United Nations system, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia and the media. A special effort should be made to support

public relations efforts to publicize the event widely and to mobilize substantial participation in the events organized under the umbrella of the Conference through, for example, the participation of Governments in the Conference, of parliamentarians in the forum for parliamentarians and of non-governmental organizations in the civil society and youth forums.

Recommendation 2

Besides the yearly debate in the General Assembly on the item concerning support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, Member States may wish to give their comments and observations on the review and suggestions contained in the present report (in particular in sections IV and V) and, more importantly, on their own experiences and “lessons learned” as new, restored or established democracies and/or as donors supporting democratic institutions with projects in other countries or regions. Those comments and observations would then be assembled and presented to the General Assembly and the Benin Conference for further action.

35. The inventory of the assistance given by the United Nations system to Governments to promote new or restored democracies, mentioned in section IV, has been useful. Its frequency should, however, be adjusted to serve the needs of the international community better. Accordingly, I propose that:

Recommendation 3

The inventory of assistance given by the United Nations system to Governments to strengthen new or restored democracies should be conducted every third or fourth year, or in years preceding the holding of future conferences of new or restored democracies.

36. The international conferences of new or restored democracies are part of a growing trend indicating that the process of democratization is a global phenomenon. New and fragile democracies still face very difficult challenges and even periodic regressions, however. During recent years it has been noted that even established democracies continue to face challenges in the response of their societies to problems such as violent crime, discrimination, corruption, the manipulation of public opinion and inefficiencies in the public sector and in governance. Consequently, while assistance to new or restored democracies should continue and increase in scope and

magnitude, debate about the measures to be taken by established democracies to address the multifaceted challenges of globalization and threats to security, progress and development in the coming decades should not be neglected.

37. I have previously recommended that all Member States should be invited to the international conference of new or restored democracies. This is something the host of each conference should decide in consultation with other Member States. I see a need, however, for all Member States to reflect more actively on the direction of the democratic movement as we enter the new millennium.

38. As we prepare for the first international conference on the African continent, it is vital not to lose momentum in the process of strengthening democratic institutions and development. The General Assembly and all other organs and bodies of the United Nations have an important role in that process. For my part, I am committed to the ideals of democracy and am determined to work to see them attained in the daily work of the United Nations.

Notes

¹ The Web site, entitled "Democratization in Governance: International Conferences on New or Restored Democracies," can be found at the following address: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/docs/democratization.htm>.

² *Report of the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993* (A/CONF.157/24 (Part I)), chap. III.