The History and Evolution of the New or Restored Democracies Movement

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Executive Summary

The Conferences of New or Restored Democracies deserve the credit for starting a distinct process for the promotion of democratic values and for stimulating a new brand of international cooperation in favour of democracy, including by bringing the issue on the agenda of the General Assembly.

Some critical questions were raised in the process: is it the mandate of the United Nations to promote a certain political system? If the response is affirmative, why is it that not all its Members participated from the beginning, but only a limited number, chosen on criteria that had not been produced by the United Nations? Is there a model some particular countries may want to impose onto others, or should the United Nations define a concept that might distinguish clearly between democratic countries and non-democratic ones?

Some answers have been given and basically they are:

i) The United Nations has legitimacy and competence to contribute to democratisation in its Member States; the existing resolutions and plans of action constitute a fairly comprehensive corpus of recommendations;

ii) The approach that led to the adoption of various resolutions generated by the participants in the Conferences of New or Restored Democracies adopted by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, has the substantial comparative advantage of emerging from the
young democracies themselves.

iii) Even if, for the time being, there is no monitoring mechanism or obligation of countries, resolutions like “Promoting and consolidating democracy” adopted by the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly indicate the potential for a normative effort and will, by their very existence, become benchmarks, points of reference for any future assessment of the genuine nature of the democratic transformation of the governance in numerous countries;

iv) The entire new thinking on the issue of democracy, as prompted by the new or restored democracies, has gone beyond the traditional lines of the North-South differences in the United Nations and it is based on shared values.

Since 1994, the conceptual and political background of international action for democracy has constantly improved. Nevertheless, many aspects remained to be clarified, from the nature of the United Nations involvement to the availability of the resources necessary to take action, from the issues of conditionality in the foreign aid to that of national accountability, transparency and other dimensions of governance to be assumed by governments. Issues like democratic culture, genuine participation, awareness of the public on the potential of democracy in generating sustainable development, the impact of globalisation on the exercise of power nationally, and many others need further screening and reflection in international instruments.

A useful possible new direction in the consolidation of comprehensive movement in favour of democracy would be to develop subjects of common interest for both young and consolidated democracies, such as: i) the role of political parties as central institutions of pluralistic societies; ii) the reform of various systems of funding the political structures; iii) the effect of globalisation upon
the distribution of power in democratic societies;

The United Nations, in its turn, should indeed not only support - “within existing resources” – the Governments of new or restored democracies, but develop a meaningful function of its own, as a contribution to the realization of the goals and purposes of the Charter:

i) Taking upon, more determinedly, the responsibility to engage Member States in a systematic dialogue upon the values of democracy, and the need to recognize the universal relevance of a core number of descriptive elements;

ii) Making its own the plans of action adopted by the new or restored democracies;

iii) Stimulating a process that may lead to a comprehensive normative framework starting from the existing resolution 55/96 of the United Nations General Assembly, but taking into account existing codes of conduct, guidelines, various good practices and experiences, lessons learned in the field;

iv) Ensuring coherence and stimulating synergies in the UN system so as to make sure that all activities which catalyse democratisation processes contribute to the promotion of goals of perennial, rather than circumstantial, value for the beneficiary countries;

v) Institutionalising the interaction between the UN Secretary-General and regional organizations;

vi) Including more democratisation-oriented action in its peace-making, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building, as to provide more sustainability to the objectives pursued in fragile conflict-torn societies.
A start outside the United Nations

1. The history of democracy is a long one, but not in the United Nations context. When the victors in Second World War drafted the Charter, they could not lay down in it anything like democracy as such, although the issue of human rights was central in the whole construction of the post-war era. As the United Nations system developed simultaneously with its use as an arena for the Cold War type of ideological confrontation, there was no way to bring democracy on its agenda, implicitly or explicitly. That is why a clear movement in the promotion of democratic values started outside the United Nations.

Manila: defending democracy

2. A significant step in this direction was the International Conference of Newly Restored Democracies that took place in Manila, Philippines, in 1988. One should never overstate the importance of that Conference despite its modest attendance. Its great merit was that it brought to the fore a new brand of international cooperation in favour of democracy. Subsequently, the seed planted in Manila has gradually produced fruit. The Manila conference initiated an original concept, whose features deserve to be emphasized.

3. The Conference and its objectives were inspired by the very experience of the host country. The Philippines knew directly the ups and downs of political turmoil. The country faced democratic advances and setbacks. The reborn democracy was obviously in need to express its credo, and to state to the world what was required for the Filipino democracy to last.

   In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Philippines was a young independent republic, with a constitution consecrating a bicameral Parliament and a presidential term of four years,
renewable once. However, in 1972 President Ferdinand Marcos who was approaching the end of his second term challenged the system. When time came for him to leave power, he did not. He imposed martial law (1972-1981) just to maintain the status quo in terms of his stay in power. In June 1981 he was elected for a six-year term by an overwhelming majority, while the opposition refused to participate in the elections.

In August 1983, the situation started to change when Benigno Aquino, the opposition leader regarded as a credible alternative to president Marcos, was assassinated under military escort. A series of massive demonstrations followed in which discontent was expressed for the first time. In the end Marcos had to fly to Hawaii. In March 1986, a transitional constitution was proclaimed - to function for one year - while a permanent one was drafted. The new constitution was approved in February 1987.

4. The selection of participating countries was a careful and rigorous process. It took into account a fixed period of time (1973-1988) during which fifteen countries turned from right-wing dictatorships to more promising stable constitutional democracies. Essentially, the Conference was open to “newly restored democracies”. The fifteen countries placed in that category were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay. Thirteen of these actually attended the event. Country profiles for all participants were background papers for the Conference. The profiles, which explained the changes of regime that justified invitation, were included in the final report of the event.

5. Thirdly, it is useful to note the cross-regional composition of the group. This included the
host country from Asia and three young European democracies, already members of NATO and the
European Union at that time. The other countries came from Latin America and the Caribbean,
illustrating the twilight of the military juntas in the region. The regional representation anticipated
one crucial issue in all debates on democracy, that is the existence of a “model” in democracy.

**Managua: addressing vulnerabilities**

6. The Second International Conference of New or Restored Democracies held in Managua,
Nicaragua, in 1994, led to the endorsement of a first, very comprehensive Plan of Action⁴ for
democracy. The message from the participants to the international community was so strong that the
United Nations General Assembly included on its agenda at the 49th session a permanent item on
democracy. For the first time in its history, the General Assembly was called to examine an item
entitled “Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of governments to promote and
consolidate new or restored democracies”. A series of relevant resolutions has followed⁵, which gave
shape to the role the United Nations has to play in this field.

7. The Managua Conference was indeed an attempt to reflect the magnitude of the changes that
took place in 1989 and early ‘90s. It was meant not only to analyse the meanings of the profound
transformations that happened particularly in Europe, but also to create a new type of solidarity
among the emerging democracies, as well as between them and the “traditional” democracies. The
Nicaraguan authorities themselves explained the reasons behind the idea of taking over the
organization of a second conference called, this time, “of new or restored democracies”.

8. The host country identified three main reasons to justify the need for a specific international
dialogue on democracy:
i) the **structural vulnerability** of the emerging democracies, where institutional and organizational weaknesses needed to be overcome in order to avoid regression: the fragility of new democracies was found to differ from region to region, but in general associated to the absence of democratic institutions, mechanisms and traditions, including the absence of a genuine democratic mentality. The need “to clearly identify the interdependence between political stability and the viability of reforms towards a market economy” was emphasized.

ii) their **relative isolation** and the painful nature of the transition, given that democratic processes had occurred in each region “in an isolated manner, without contact points or communication among them, which would allow for crossed fertilization and mutual trans-regional support which would enrich and supply vitality to each one of these initiating democratic processes”.

iii) the existence of some **common principles and interests**, and among them: “their commitment to dialogue, to peaceful inter-living, to respect for political pluralism and for the principles of national independence, their non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, to the free determination of the people and respect for international law”.  

9. Like in the case of the Philippines, it was in the specific interests of Nicaragua to organize a Conference as a way to emphasize its own political statement. In fact, Nicaragua was one of the countries invited to the first Conference in Manila. In 1988, the President of the country was Daniel Ortega Saavedra, representative of the Sandinista Movement, elected on 4 November 1984 with 63% of the votes for a six-year term starting on 10 January 1985. Nevertheless, the authorities were facing the opposition of the armed guerrillas known as “contras”. The very participation of the Nicaraguan Government in Manila had been challenged: “Some say that Nicaragua should not participate in this
meeting because we are not a restored democracy. To some extent they are right, inasmuch as we are
not a restored democracy, since we could not restore something we have never had in our history…
We are a new democracy, both in the historical.. and in the ideological sense.”

In 1994, the Sandinistas were no longer in power. A new government and a new President,
Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, were in office. The Chairman of the Conference, the minister of
foreign affairs, Ernesto Leal Sánchez, explained the moment: “In 1988 .. Nicaragua lacked
democratic institutions and was waging a war that polarized and militarised society leaving its
sequels of thousands of weapons in civilians’ hands”. In her turn, President Chamorro explained why
Nicaragua needed to end isolation, to share experience in democratic learning and to receive
understanding, cooperation and support: “I received a country covered with the smoke of guns,
resulting from a war of almost a decade between Nicaraguan brothers... I also inherited the mission
of wiping out of our history that bitter crop of hatred and animosity which for so long confronted
Nicaraguans”.

10. At that time, Nicaragua had very limited diplomatic representation abroad. It lacked direct
information, other than media reports, on the nature and details of changes that took place in remote
countries from regions like Eastern Europe or Africa. The host country had to make, however,
important decisions about whom, and with what status, to invite to the Conference. The documentary
work was thorny and it was completed with help from the United Nations. Eventually fifty-two
countries (twenty-two from Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Republics, eighteen from
Latin America and the Caribbean, seven from Africa and five from Asia) attended the Conference.
The “fully-fledged participants” were joined by twenty-five observers (mostly from western
democracies). While the list as a whole appeared satisfactory in terms of common political sense, no clear criteria of selection could be perceived.

**Bucharest: accelerating transition**

11. It was a natural choice to hold the next conference in Central and Eastern Europe. The region had undergone the most profound and comprehensive political and economic reforms. After decades of central planning, post-communist societies were painfully trying to reintegrate into world open markets. However, the first steps meant the financial and trade liberalization or, in other words, the shrinking of the state resources and authority. The immediate result was the creation of dramatic cleavages disparities within societies, whose main virtue was homogeneity. The government withdrew from what was certainly an excessive central role, without replacing that retraction with an equally solid building of democratic instruments. For some time, and in some countries, it was uncertain whether the people had been given the effective power to exercise their democratic rights beyond elections and political pluralism.

12. In 1994, when Romania was designated to host the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, democracy and an open market appeared as the only viable options for many states in the region, with a good promise of stability and consolidation of ongoing democratic processes. A sharp contrast was offered, however, by the tragic developments on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

In 1997, when the Conference actually took place (from 2 to 4 September), samples of irreversible democratic processes had been produced. The accession of countries like Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to NATO had been announced in Madrid, a few months earlier.
Connected as they were to the specific requirements to accede to NATO or the European Union, the full acceptance and implementation of **democratic values and practices were obviously the fundamental choice.** Integration into the democratic Europe became crucial for many Central and Eastern European countries and a vital engine for maintaining political and economic reforms. The year 1997 was a benchmark, in the sense that the horizons became clearer, while the transition painfully went on. As the President of Romania at the time put it: “It seems that, at least in the Central and East European countries, we have now entered a new historical stage, which I would call “post-transition”. Post-transition does not mean that we have reached the shore and have covered all the way between the two political regimes, totalitarianism and democracy. Post-transition means that our political will is no longer a prisoner of the past. Post-transition means that our political will can devote itself entirely to the future. (…) Post-transition is the time when we, the citizens of the new or restored democracies, have the opportunity to write the history of our future.”

13. The Conference in Bucharest also provided a few indications on how the cross-continental dimension of the debate on democracy was seen nine years after the first Conference in Manila. One of the protagonists of the first Conference, Raul Manglapus, former Philippine Foreign Minister, was there to deal with a query that is still recurrent in all consideration of the subject: “A summit of the leaders of the new or restored democracies from all continents and regions of the world will unmask the seductive authoritarian excuse that democracy is capable of continental, regional and national variation. Such a summit would give the lie to those who insist on drawing lines to distinguish between European, American, Asian and African democracy. Such a summit would tell the world, like the Spanish leaders who restored freedom to their land in 1976, of “democracia sin
adjetivos”, democracy without adjectives, for democracy with adjectives is a mockery of democracy.”

14. The question of the “model” was updated by Carlos Guardian Debayle, the deputy minister of foreign affairs of Nicaragua: “We all agree that the consolidation of our democracies requires efficiency, transparency and participation by all sectors of the population. That means recognizing the contributions of both the majorities and of the minorities to the improvement of the democratic model. Although this model is based on common concepts and values, it has to be specific to each state and to national experiences”.

15. Likewise, Adrian Severin, the minister of foreign affairs of the host country, Romania, added his perspective on the universal vs. national significance of democratic values: “.. we in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond have had the experience of artificial transplants and our nations did not like it. It is encouraging to see that the concepts of functioning democracy, institutional improvement and good governance are not conceived as an export item for the post-communist and third world countries. We are all engaged, North and South, West and East, now on our own free will, in an unending process leading to the accomplishment of the values and principles which we all share”.

The result was a vigorous determination that a “model” may exist nevertheless and this view was reflected in the final result of the Conference. The Bucharest document pointed out that there was “an almost universal recognition that a democratic system of government is the best model to ensure a framework of liberties for lasting solutions to the political, economic and social problems that our societies face”. The text, to which both governments and NGOs contributed, shattered the hesitations on the role of the international community and of the United Nations in promoting
democracy, including by agreeing upon incipient normative elements.

**Cotonou: democracy and crisis management**

16. Subsequently, the choice of an African country to host the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracy was not only a reflection of the geographical rotation and symbolism but also a necessary and timely move. The wave of political liberalization that Africa witnessed in mid '90s, as fragile as it may be considered, was unprecedented. Africa was an arena, which the Cold War brought to the fore as a field of confrontation for the imposition of the communist ideas against the diverse postcolonial ideological versions of totalitarianism, developed essentially by leaders who led their countries to independence. In 2000, the continent was well beyond the (in)famous outcry of Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator of Zaire, who declared, and he meant it: “*Democracy is not for Africa*”.

17. The changes in Europe proved that dictatorial regimes, no matter how powerful and armed, could be challenged. African societies started to understand that repression, economic mismanagement, sterile anti-North rhetoric, absence of free and independent media, and corruption might never lead them to overcome underdevelopment and isolation. The failure of most African governments to provide good governance and to overcome the economic crisis, their inability to prevent internal conflicts, as well as the loss of support from the former communist regimes generated the need for different patterns in the political designs developed after accession to independence. As a result, new movements have succeeded in compelling military dictators to accept genuinely free and fair elections, single party political schemes to allow more parties to accede to power, lifetime presidential regimes to adopt a limited number of mandates and allow competition.
18. The building of democracy in Africa appeared the most difficult challenge, particularly given the heritage of underdevelopment and conflict. Democratization fuelled the expectations of the majority of pauperized and hopeless peoples for a better life. It also challenged the powerful minorities of local elites, whose instincts to survive in power only led to a partial and half-hearted embrace of democracy. A number of countries embarked themselves upon meaningful transitional processes, although often the changes did not depart too much from the traditional authoritarian patterns, adequate accountability was missing, and the rule of law and separation of powers were more nominal than effective. Some African leaders employed democratic values and mechanisms to accede to power, but subsequently showed little tolerance for the opposition. Benin was a case study of a smooth, non-violent and genuine shift to democracy.

19. For obvious reasons, it was not possible to consider the emergence of democracy in the region in isolation from the international context, which interfered directly or indirectly with domestic politics in African countries, as recognized by African researchers themselves. While the need for democracy was self-evident, a full answer has not been given to the fundamental question: is there any particular model that suits the African specificity best? One scholar envisages a few theoretical options: i/ the new democracy (based on recognition of the sovereignty of people, social justice seen as a brand different from the juridical notion of justice under “liberal democracy” and social equity dissociated from the capitalist representation of property); ii/ the democratic governance (slightly different from the concept of good governance as recently developed in the United Nations texts, retaining as a main feature regular interaction between government and civil society as well as popular participation); iii/ a social democracy for Africa (which would mean not
only liberties, but also entitlement to decent livelihood and access to productive resources).

Against this background, it is worth noting that the Conference in Benin acknowledged that democratization is a **national responsibility**, agreed that human rights and fundamental freedoms come first, and pledged for their respect, as well as for promotion of a few other basic ingredients of democracy: political pluralism, greater participation by citizens, rule of law and separation of constitutional powers, good governance, independence and freedom of media, strong and free civil society.

20. The democratic processes in Africa coincided with the undertaking of a series of special initiatives of the United Nations\(^\text{12}\) devoted to this continent. These helped the Cotonou Conference to be the first in the series where the Secretary-General participated personally. Kofi Annan said on the occasion: “The building of these African nations has been one long struggle against poverty, ignorance, disease and conflict. It is hardly surprising that African democracy has known many setbacks. What is striking, rather, is the fierce and ever-growing thirst for democracy that Africans have shown; their indomitable courage in defying oppressive regimes; and their successes, in so many countries, in insisting on accountable government”.\(^\text{13}\)

**Changing patterns and adapting to challenges**

21. It is worth noting that a fundamental change occurred in the conception of the conferences of new or restored democracies. While participation in the first three editions was selective, as appraised by the host countries (a small group identified according to clear and transparent criteria in Manila, elaborated lists of “participants” and “observers” for Managua and Bucharest), in Cotonou, for the first time all countries were invited. That led to a participation of 111 governmental
delegations. This change followed some discussions generated in particular after the Bucharest Conference. The issue was rooted in the critical question: is it the mandate of the United Nations to promote a certain political system? The response being, why is it that not all its Members participate in the process, but only a limited number, chosen on criteria that had not been produced by the United Nations? Is there a model some particular countries may want to impose onto others, or should the United Nations define a concept that might distinguish clearly between democratic countries and non-democratic ones?

22. A specific debate to properly answer this particular question might have taken too much time, so the quick fix solution was suggested in the report of the Secretary General issued after the third Conference: “While it is advisable that future conferences should remain outside the direct sponsorship of the United Nations, consideration should perhaps be given to inviting all States Members of the United Nations”14. A subsequent resolution15 of the General Assembly took note of the proposal of the Secretary-General that “future conferences on democracy be open to all Member States of the United Nations that wish to participate”. A suggestion translated into practice by Benin.

23. Therefore, the United Nations eventually favoured an all-inclusive approach in the debates of the new or restored democracies, making no distinction between recognizable democracies and cases indicating something rather less. This approach certainly put at some risk the clarity of the organization’s own assessment on democracy, but is has, however, a few important merits.

Firstly, it strengthens the **significance of the inclusion on the agenda** of the United Nations of the issue of democracy as such, and of the need to assist and support countries in their effort to build democratic societies. Secondly, by including all countries in the debate and action, the United
Nations **stresses the universal relevance of the democratic values and principles**. Thirdly, by emphasizing that democracy is universally needed, the next consequence is that United Nations possesses **enhanced legitimacy** to produce and promote concepts and norms, and to involve itself in resolute action. Fourthly, on a broader perspective, this approach suggests the need not to confine democracy to an exclusive club, but to engage in **attracting interest and making the democratic behaviour more appealing** to those who are reluctant, for opportunistic or ideological reasons.

24. It is equally interesting that while the Government of Benin invited to Cotonou all United Nations Member States, the international interest for democracy created a pattern where selective participation was the key feature. In the year 2000, a Group of convening countries consisting of the Czech Republic, Chile, India, Mali, Poland, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America called for a conference entitled “Towards a Community of Democracies” held in Warsaw, from 25 to 27 June 2002. The Conference was attended by 106 countries. The Declaration adopted by the new Conference emphasized that the Community of Democracies was determined to work together to promote and uphold democracy, to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions and to support the adherence to common democratic values and standards. A second Conference entitled “Democracy: Investing for Peace and Security” was held in Seoul, from 10 to 12 November 2002, with the participation of 110 countries. The Seoul Plan of Action adopted guidelines for the promotion, consolidation and protection of democracy and fostering cooperation for the upholding of democracy against “the emerging threats of the 21st century”.

25. Certainly, in view of the selective nature of the process, once a universal one is officially blessed by the United Nations, the countries left outside will always challenge the relevance of the
work of such a body. Subjective as it is, the approach practiced by the Community of Democracies has its merits too. Firstly, it avoids the confusion that we may live in a world where all regimes are democratic. While the existence of differences is widely admitted, it is obvious that there exist fundamental characteristics whose absence indicates non-democratic regimes, to various degrees. A spade should be called a spade, although that should affect a good relationship among countries that share different political values. Secondly, it creates a better awareness over the validity of democratic principles and norms, all over the world, in particular in third world countries. They may see for instance that some developing countries have in common not only poverty, but also non-democratic, inefficient and corrupt regimes. Moreover, they will find in the “community of democracies” countries similar to their own, but for which democracy started to bear fruit in terms of development and inclusion in the world mainstream. Thirdly, inspiration, arguments and incentives will be given to those political forces and to the protagonists of the civil society, to strive more effectively for democratisation in those countries where there is a deficit of democracy, qualified as such by the rest of the world.

Promotion of democracy in the United Nations system

26. Inasmuch as the upgrading of the issue of democracy in the multilateral system is concerned, the most important result of the Conferences of New or Restored Democracies has been the interaction with the United Nations. As indicated before, as a result of the Plan of Action adopted by the Second International Conference on that occasion, the General Assembly\textsuperscript{16} requested the Secretary-General “to study the ways and mechanisms in which the United Nations system could support the efforts of Government to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies” and
decided to include on its own agenda an item on that matter.

The first report of the Secretary-General\textsuperscript{17} was, as a consequence, a comprehensive one. Despite its cautious tone (“the United Nations system, in assisting and supporting the efforts of Government to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, does not endorse or promote any specific form of government”) the report nevertheless produced a definition of “democratisation” and identified a series of actions in which the system could be engaged, besides the electoral assistance. Two of them represented a genuine breakthrough and brought political connotations in the conceptual background about the United Nations action: promoting a\textbf{democratic culture} and building\textbf{institutions for democracy}. They allowed unprecedented examination of issues like political parties and movements, democratic structures of government, the rule of law, accountability and transparency in the public sector management, civil service reform, and other questions traditionally considered exclusively within the ambit of national sovereignty.

A new message was directed to the UN family: “Some agencies have tended to concentrate on the administrative aspects of governance, encouraging the development of an efficient, independent, accountable and open public sector. The future challenge to such agencies will be to widen this approach to take into account the social and political aspects of governance, institution-building and democratisation, and to coordinate their programmes at an early stage with other United Nations entities working in these fields”\textsuperscript{18}

Based on that report, the General Assembly recognized that the organization had “an important role to play in providing timely, appropriate and coherent support to the effort of Governments to achieve democratisation within the context of their development efforts”\textsuperscript{19}. The
General Assembly also called for support to its Member States in achieving the goal of
democratisation, including by “innovative ways and means”. Indeed innovation, at least
contceptually, was already in, since Member States themselves were encouraged to promote
democratisation. By adopting this resolution formally and by consensus, the General Assembly
actually put an end to its political neutrality and clearly adopted promotion of democracy as a goal
of the organization.

28. The following report of the Secretary-General\textsuperscript{20} does not bring many novelties, but it focuses
more on the need for the United Nations to integrate the civil society into its work aiming at a
democratic development. The report noted that “widespread disillusion with the results of
democratisation has direct political consequences on electoral processes and government processes
and, in certain instances, can even lead to the unravelling of the process of democratisation itself”.\textsuperscript{21}

29. The Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies triggered new dynamics
in the process, animated by a sense of pragmatism.

First, the document adopted in Bucharest was not meant to be another declaration, but action
oriented “Progress review and recommendations”\textsuperscript{22} in which, as the General Assembly notes\textsuperscript{23}, the
progress towards democratisation and consolidation of democratic institutions was assessed and
guidelines, principles and recommendations were addressed to Governments, civil society, the
private sector, donor countries and international community, in general.

Secondly, a consistent follow-up process was initiated by the host country in the aftermath of
the Conference, with a quadruple effect: the process gained more visibility and enhanced
participation from non-governmental actors; the United Nations system became part of a follow-up
mechanism, thus creating more interaction with the movement of new or restored democracies; the Bucharest follow-up emulated various democratisation-related activities, with enhanced legitimacy from the universal perspective of the United Nations, including other intergovernmental conferences; a substantial process was generated in the Commission on Human Rights, where the issues related to democracy became a solid presence in debates and action-taking.

30. Indeed, the mandate of former Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ended with a third flag-bearing document (following the two Agendas, for peace and for development), namely “An agenda for democratisation”\(^{24}\). The documents were issued in the last days of his mandate, and regrettably no debates on the new agendas were undertaken. However, the first report of the new Secretary-General on the item entitled “Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies” recognized that democracy had more \textbf{practical relevance} to the United Nations than ever before: “In the late 1990s, the international community witnessed coups d’état, threats of rebellions, corruption of officials and problems in elections, governance and transitions to market-economy on a daily basis. All these difficulties are related to questions of democracy (….) As the international community deals less with interstate wars and more with internal conflicts, democratisation has gained an immediate relevance for millions who aspire to achieve its implementation”.\(^{25}\)

31. The follow-up process to the Bucharest Conference is described in detail in subsequent reports\(^{26}\) on the same item. Most of the proposals have materialized (creation of web sites on democratisation and governance, a Democracy Forum, compilation of information on inventories of databases and directories pertaining to democratisation), other actions were triggered but not
completed (self-assessments by Governments on democratisation and governance assistance provided to them, indicators on democracy advances). One of the most important results of the follow-up was the proposal by Romania of a “Code of democratic conduct”, which ended up in a new series of resolutions, particularly in the Commission on Human Rights.

A normative perspective

32. Like the word "model", the notion of “code” is a difficult political piece to swallow. That is because it implies an existing paradigm associated automatically with the Western kind of democracy. It is, therefore, difficult to be accepted in a multilateral setting. The Secretary-General himself in his report of 1995 says “Democracy is not a model to be copied from certain States, but a goal to be attained by all peoples and assimilated by all cultures. It may take many forms, depending on the characteristics and circumstances of societies”. This is true. Yet, no one can deny that beyond a variety of expressions of the notion of democracy, there exist unmistakable common grounds that define democracy. In its capacity as Chair of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, it was Romania that started the road toward acquiescence by the international community, for such a set of grounds. It was essentially an extraction from “the gradual new thinking“ that emerged form the Bucharest Conference, as acknowledged by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report to the 52nd General Assembly.

33. That was no easy thing to do. As a matter of fact, very few participants in the follow-up mechanism sincerely believed that a United Nations body would ever endorse a Code of Democratic Conduct. While many Governments believe or claim that they behave democratically, few would be happy to know that there exists a normative document, be it non-binding, which attempts to define
what democracy actually means.

Despite the scepticism, Romania came up with a first draft of a Code of Democratic Conduct. In July 1999, the draft was presented to the third committee of the General Assembly with the clearly stated intention to present it for approval, at its 54th session. The aim of the document was briefly described by Romania as “recommending a basic set of norms of democratic conduct for Governments in the exercise of power (free, fair and competitive elections, separation of powers, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening the rule of law and appliance of practices of good governance, increasing participation of civil society in the development of democracy and enhancing social cohesion and solidarity)”29.

34. The ambition of the text was to go beyond repetition of human rights norms, and to give a more complete description of a democratic conduct, with all interconnections among crucial dimensions of the social and political life in a sustainable democratic society. After some negotiations the draft code rapidly attracted the support of sixty states. The good beginning made the co-sponsors believe that consensus was possible. Yet, the idea of “codifying” democratic behaviour and giving it the high authority of the General Assembly could not make its way easily. A group of countries expressed strong opposition and the consensus pre-requisite was out of the question. As for Romania and the co-sponsors it was unclear at that stage whether or not consensus was essential. They voluntarily withdrew the draft resolution, waiting for the idea to come of age.

35. The idea was taken up soon after, since they felt that completion of the initiative could greatly contribute to the confirmation of a genuine belief in democracy. Romania presented a draft resolution in the Commission on Human Rights in its April 2000 session. It used an excellent path paved by a
breakthrough resolution on promotion of the right to democracy adopted the previous year. The resolution was given a new name: “Promoting and consolidating democracy”. The uncomfortable title of “Code” was removed, but the substance was kept approximately intact. There was some opposition again, but this time the co-sponsors firmly went to vote. The result was better than expected. Resolution 2000/47 was adopted with forty-five votes in favour, zero against and eight abstentions. Besides this expression of clear support, an unusual fact happened. The Commission rejected some unfriendly amendments, although they represented ad-litteram excerpts form the universally recognized language of the UN Charter. The message was clear that Governments could no longer use existing stipulations to deny their own peoples’ clearly described right to democracy. The same year, the resolution “Promoting and consolidating democracy” was adopted by the General Assembly. Various other aspects of democracy have been subsequently dealt with by a number of resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights.

36. These vigorous developments clearly consolidated the place of the issues of democracy and democratisation on the agenda of the United Nations. Once this platform had strengthened, the organization was expecting, more clarity in terms of its specific new role. The Member States were invited “to reflect more actively on the direction of the democratic movement”. One year latter, the enthusiastic tone of previous reports of the Secretary-General somehow fell down when the issue of resources for implementation was brought to the fore: “I believe that the whole United Nations system stands ready to see democracy-building and democratisation assistance placed among its foremost priorities. But, for this to happen in practice, we need the political, administrative and financial support of all Member States.”
37. The Conference of Benin certainly brought new nuances to the debate of democracy, by adding a particular emphasis on its dependence upon peace and security. The participants condemned "all military coups d'état, all forms of terrorism and violence against democratic, freely elected governments, all undemocratic means of gaining, wielding and staying in power and all unconstitutional changes of governments". Needless to say, the Secretary General undertook an evaluation of the developments that led to the Cotonou Conference. It is worth noting a few of his remarks:

i) there was an increasing body of resolutions, declarations and other international political and legal texts accumulated since Manila 1988;

ii) in the 1990s the number of democracies across the globe nearly doubled;

iii) essential elements of democracy were identified and accepted in various United Nations documents;

iv) inextricable links between democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and development were reaffirmed;

v) the universality of democracy as an ideal and a goal was widely acknowledged.

38. A few conclusions can be drawn out of the scrutiny of the various negotiations and developments in the international interaction around the issue of promoting democracy:

i) the United Nations has legitimacy and competence to contribute to democritisation in its Member States; the existing resolutions and plans of action constitute a fairly comprehensive corpus of recommendations;

ii) the approach that led to the adoption of various resolutions generated by the participants in
the movement of new or restored democracies adopted by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, has the substantial comparative advantage of emerging from the young democracies themselves. From this perspective, the controversies about the “model” imposed are less relevant;

iii) Even if, for the time being, there is no monitoring mechanism or obligation of countries, resolutions like “Promoting and consolidating democracy” indicate the need for a normative effort and will, by their very existence, become benchmarks, points of reference for any future assessment of the genuine nature of the democratic transformation of the governance in numerous countries;

iv) The entire new thinking on the issue of democracy, as prompted by the new or restored democracies, has gone beyond the traditional lines of the North-South differences in the United Nations and it is based on shared values.

**Perspectives in the context of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies**

39. One can say that in the period between 1994 when the movement of new or restored democracies made its entrance in the UN system and the 2000 Cotonou Conference, the conceptual and political background of international action for democracy has constantly improved. Even so, many questions remained to be answered, from the nature of the United Nations involvement to availability of the resources necessary to take action, from the issues of conditionality in the foreign aid to that of national accountability, transparency and other dimensions of governance to be assumed by governments. Issues like democratic culture, genuine participation, awareness of the public on the potential of democracy in generating sustainable development, the impact of
globalisation on the exercise of power nationally, and many others need further screening and reflection in international instruments.

40. A useful possible new direction in the consolidation of comprehensive movement in favour of democracy would be to develop subjects of common interest for both young and consolidated democracies. While it is obvious that the needs and means of the two groups differ very much, their perception of fighting for the same goal of strengthening a functioning and effective democracy is, politically, very important. If this aspiration is sincerely pursued in a concerted manner, democracy may turn into global public goods, which will have a powerful impact on international relations and domestic governance. This possible dimension will also depend on the genuine willingness of consolidated democracies to look and act less as providers of democratic lessons and more as partners that themselves have problems in maintaining the proper functioning of their democratic institutions.

41. Among such subjects of common interest for the Conference as a universal forum, a few could be indeed useful for all participants, be they old, new or restored democracies:

   i) the role of political parties as central institutions of pluralistic societies;

      Political parties are essential structures whose inputs provide ideological bases and support to decision-makers. They are laboratories where political leaders are prepared to assume power. Many of the features of governance depend upon the values fostered within parties.

   ii) the reform of various systems of funding the political structures;

      Cases of corruption in traditional democracies, through vicious and non-transparent funding of electoral campaigns, indicate that we have to deal with serious issues, which might undermine
democratic values. There should be an emphasis on the morality of political life. Corruption within parties must be eliminated, be it undue distribution of favours to political clients, or abusive influence on politics by powerful individual or groups, interested in their own advantage.

iii) the effect of globalisation upon the distribution of power in democratic societies;

Admittedly representative Governments may have less control over some aspects of the economic, social and cultural life of the societies they rule, by sharing their powers with non-state entities. Consequently, there is a need to scrutinize the implicit erosion of the significance of the votes that brought Governments to power.

42. The United Nations, in its turn, should indeed not only support - “within existing resources” – the Governments of new or restored democracies, but develop a meaningful function of its own as a contribution to the realization of the goals and purposes of the Charter, adopted as it is by “we, the peoples”. A few possible first steps in this direction:

i) taking upon, more determinedly, the responsibility to engage Member States in a more systematic dialogue upon the values of democracy, and the need to recognize the universal relevance of a core number of descriptive elements.

It is encouraging in this respect the willingness of the Commission on Human Rights to embark upon such avenues. The debate is not a futile exercise, since it may contribute to the definitive abandonment of prejudices against democracy as an ideology promoted for the interests of a part of the world solely. Dialogue will also broaden the platform of common interests, as well as the understanding of democracy as a system conducive to stability and human development.

ii) making its own Plans of action adopted by the new or restored democracies.
As far they as may appear from the decision-making mechanisms of the United Nations machinery, it ought not to ignore that new or restored democracies make a comfortable majority in the General Assembly.

iii) stimulating a process that may lead to a comprehensive **Methodological Framework for Promoting and Consolidating Democracy**, starting from the existing resolution 55/96 of the United Nations General Assembly, but taking into account existing codes of conduct, guidelines, various good practices and experiences, lessons learned in the field;

iv) ensuring **coherence** and stimulating **synergies** in the UN system so as to make sure that all activities which catalyse democratisation processes contribute to the promotion of goals of perennial, rather than circumstantial, value for the beneficiary countries.

A way to generalize interest in promoting democracy is indeed to include in the mission statements or terms of reference of various UN bodies, treaty bodies, special procedures on human rights, objectives related to observing institutions of democracy and assist countries in making them work better;

v) institutionalising the interaction between the UN Secretary General and **regional organizations**;

The United Nations should take a more proactive position in promoting universal respect for democratic values, without challenging cultural values and specificities, but also by making sure that diversity and local specificity do not serve as pretexts for the absence of genuine democracy. In this respect, it is very important to recognize the “new thinking” of organizations such as the African Union, whose constitution contains a firm commitment to the promotion of democracy.
vi) including more **democratisation oriented action** in its peace-making, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building, as to provide more sustainability to the objectives pursued in fragile conflict-torn societies. That is the best promise of peace since it can move struggle for the battlefields to the ballot boxes, and turn violent conflict between warlords to peaceful competition between groups representing the inherent diversity of societies.

43. The Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies should build upon what previous meetings have agreed. New dimensions of the need to preserve and consolidate democracy, like for instance, those brought by terror on September 11th and the anti-terrorist war that followed, may indeed be relevant. Recent developments have given more concrete shape to the commitments of Governments to preach and practice democracy. There is an increasing realization that democracy is meaningful and might become more instrumental in generating stability and opportunities for development. Above all, this trend is explainable not only in terms of geopolitical changes but also, and perhaps more, in terms of the genuine will of societies. This assertion implies that the new profile democracy now has, among other priorities of the United Nations, should be constantly and pragmatically elevated. Member States that are fully committed to support lasting democratic rule, home and elsewhere, may delegate, one day, more authority to their organization. Referring to the new avenues open by the Constitution of the African Union, in particular Article 3138, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said: “I look forward to the day when the General Assembly of the United Nations will follow Africa’s lead, and apply similarly stringent standards to all its members”39. For the time being, there are no resources really to place democracy at the heart of the United Nations mandate. Life may prove that promoting democracy is the most appropriate way to
achieve the fundamental objectives of the United Nations and the least costly to preserve peace and security.

The movement of new or restored democracies should engage in constant and action oriented endeavours for implementation of its own recommendations. This objective could be achieved, \textit{inter alia}, by institutionalising further the existing follow-up mechanism and the interaction with the world organization. The movement has already inspired and legitimised some support by the United Nations system. The commitment of the participating countries has the potential to become a driving force in generating further involvement and more synergy with the current activities of the United Nations. What is needed is a genuine will of participating governments, which are expected to acknowledge firmly the core principles and values defining democracy and to act accordingly for their translation into life.

\textit{Revised as of 7 May 2003}

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1 However, the United Nations involved itself in electoral assistance.
2 The absent were Bolivia and Guatemala.
4 United Nations, General Assembly, doc. A/49/713, Annex II.
7 Reynaldo Antonio Tefel, Ministro de Seguridad Social, Nicaragua, discurso de apertura (original in Spanish), Manila Declaration on Democracy, Speeches and Documents.
8 Address by Emil Constantinescu, president of Romania, Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, Bucharest, 2-4 September 1997, United Nations Development Programme, the Expert Publishing House.
12 For instance, the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and

13 Kofi Annan, address to the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, 4 December 2000, United Nations, Press release SG/SM/7653, AFR/283


17 United Nations, General Assembly, A/50/332

18 Idem, p.35

19 United Nations, General Assembly, A/RES/50/133

20 United Nations, General Assembly, A/51/512

21 Idem, p.20

22 United Nations, General Assembly, A/52/334, annex, appendix

23 United Nations, General Assembly, A/RES/52/18

24 United Nations, General Assembly, A/51/761

25 United Nations, General Assembly, Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, Report of the Secretary-General, doc. A/52/513, p.8


28 United Nations, General Assembly, Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, Report of the Secretary-General, doc. A/52/513

29 United Nations, General Assembly, Letter dated 19 July 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, doc. A/54/178


34 United Nations, General Assembly, A/54/492, p. 7

35 United Nations, General Assembly, A/55/489, p. 8

36 Declaration on “Peace, security, democracy and development”, Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, Cotonou, 4-6 December 2002, United Nations, General Assembly, document A/55/889, p.7


38 Article 31 provides: “Governments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union”.