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International IDEA

Joint Training on
Effective Electoral Assistance
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Opening Speech

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Electoral assistance can be defined today as the legal, technical and logistic support provided to electoral laws, processes and institutions. It spans a broad spectrum - from the establishment of the legal framework for the administration of elections, to inclusive electoral systems and voter registration processes, support to the institutions called to administer and adjudicate upon electoral processes, through the provision of financial resources, materials, equipment and expert advice, as well as technical and financial support to civil society engaged in civic and voter education, election observation and media monitoring, including technical assistance to political parties. This implies as well the handling of a very complex and delicate set of interactions among EMBs, assistance providers, development agencies, partner country governments, CSOs, political parties, vendors. The appreciation of the sensitiveness of this delicate mechanism represents a major reason for this training.

In a time frame of little more than two years, a lot has changed in the way electoral assistance is delivered on the ground and the main actors and institutions which have provoked these changes are gathered here in this room. The paradigm shift from event-driven support to process support, identified at the beginning of the new Millennium as a necessity, it has finally taken roots, and we can congratulate ourselves for this.

The EC-UNDP partnership in electoral assistance, with which International IDEA collaborates for policy setting and methodology and from which it has received enormous inspiration and case-study material for analysis and policy development through its countless applications in the field- it has already had a palpable impact on the delivery of assistance and has turned the methodological approach we developed together into a reality. The creation of the EC-UNDP Task Force is a further step into the right direction: International IDEA is grateful for the opportunity that the EC-UNDP Task Force provides to it for being a catalyst of changes in democratic governance.

I remember very well when a team of EC experts on electoral assistance was mandated by Dominique Dellicour, in June 2005 to work together with International IDEA on the development of the first pilot modules of what has now become this very comprehensive

training course. EC and IDEA designed together at the time the electoral cycle, the tool that informs the new approach to electoral assistance.

In the meantime, the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network has considerably grown in scope and importance and it has become a global tool for knowledge generation and dissemination of authoritative information in electoral assistance with the launching of the Practitioners' Network and the ACE regional centres. Let me welcome here all our other ACE partners who are all present here (UNEAD, IFES, IFE, Elections Canada, EISA, and significantly contributed to these changes.

In the same timeframe, we have also witnessed interesting new developments of the relationship between electoral assistance and electoral observation. EU observation had already considerably evolved in the New Millennium from rubber-stamping concept of the international observation missions of early 1990s. They have been already for long rather sophisticated and complex operations, supported by a solid and tested methodology, providing independent and comprehensive assessments of the electoral process in the observed country and contributing significantly to their democratic development. EU observation missions could now become even more significant, as their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral process in a given country could be set the agenda for the following cycle of reforms and of assistance.

It is with great pleasure that I also welcome the participation of the representatives of bilateral development agencies like DFID, CIDA, SIDA, SNV Netherlands to this training course, and we very much look forward to cooperating with them in the future to tailor this training course to their specific needs within the framework of the Global Training Platform with the EC-UNDP Joint task Force.

In order to make electoral assistance really effective, a lot remains to be done. This is essentially capacity building, but not only at the level of our partner countries, but also at the level of development agencies' officials dealing with electoral assistance projects. This in order to achieve better understanding of the real needs of the electoral institutions of our partner countries and achieve better coordination among development agencies and electoral assistance providers in identifying the most appropriate ways to provide support.

Therefore, we set a very ambitious objective for this training. We have made contact, together with the EC-UNDP Task Force with the European Space Agency to video record the entire event and use its footage to post-produce the first pilot project for the development of an e-learning platform. Drawing on the long experience acquired through BRIDGE methodology and the ACE Electoral Network, International IDEA is committed to developing e-learning models for electoral assistance and democratic governance in general, and stand ready to assist the EC-UNDP partnership and all other interested actors in pioneering this learning tool.

In closing, a special thanks to the Committee of Regions for hosting this very important third edition of the event. The COR function of providing a voice to regions and local authorities is very close to International IDEA's commitment to enhance local democracy and decentralization.