

Speech at opening of the new FUBODEM offices by Mr. Roel von Meijenfeldt, Executive Director of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in La Paz, Bolivia

Your excellency the Vice President of Bolivia,

Honorable members of the Congress and Senate,

Your excellency the representative of the United Nations and members of the corps diplomatique,

Members of the Board of FUBODEM

Members of political parties and movements,

Amigos y Amigas.

It is a great privilege to speak at this happy occasion, the opening of the new office of the Bolivian Foundation for Multiparty Democracy. On behalf of my own organization, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, I first of all like to congratulate the Board and staff of the Foundation, established by the Bolivian political parties and movements with the objective to strengthen the democracy in Bolivia, with setting up your offices in this beautiful house in the centre of La Paz.

From our colleagues at the Foundation I learned, that the function of this house is expected to be a house for all of you. This is the house of the political parties and movements, open for every man and women who support Bolivia's democracy and want to participate in the process of maintaining and improving the performance of your democracy. This is to become an open house for dialogue and reflection between left and right, young and old, man and women irrespective of their background or convictions.

We are living in a time of some great paradoxes. On the one hand, democracy has become accepted as the only form of government that brings peace and long-term stability which is needed for sustainable social and economic development. It is believed that countries become fit for economic development through democracy. On the other hand, the performance of democracy and in particular that of political parties is not meeting the expectations of the majority of people that rely on the state to provide the basic necessities, such as education, healthcare, security and access to economic opportunity, in order to overcome poverty and exclusion.

It becomes even more complicated if we recognize that we need to deal with this paradox in compressed time. People are demanding instant solutions for reform processes which by their very nature require longer periods of time. We are not only dealing with introducing new institutions and procedures but also changing political cultures and practices. Democracy is more than the fight to win the next elections. Electoral democracies have contributed to the

fact that we as politicians often talk *to* each other rather than with each other. We appear to have lost the art of dialogue, engaging each other in finding solutions that are in the public interest and not only in a particular group interest. To improve the functioning of democracy it should be more than *competition* for power, it should also focus on the *accommodation* dimension, the art of resolving conflicts of interest peacefully, and on the *reconciliation* dimension, the willingness to overcome the injustices of the past.

Democracy and social justice, democracy and development are two parts of the same coin which can not be separated and it is the big challenge of our time to find the right set of institutions, to find the right set of checks and balances, to find the right set of balances between central and decentralized governance, to find the right set of policies to deliver on this challenge.

Political parties and movements all over the world, have a specific responsibility in engaging each other to find answers in how to meet this challenge. There are no blueprints, no models that can be imported from elsewhere, but there are experiences that can help to stimulate reflections. The main lesson that Ghandi taught us is, that democracy has to be developed from within, by the political actors within the country, not by outsiders. Successful transitions such as in South Africa and in the countries of the former Eastern Europe, have also learned us that to overcome divides and divisions within societies, dialogue rather than confrontation is the revolutionary means to obtain the stability for substantial social and economic growth.

As President Mandela once said: *if you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with him, than he becomes your partner.* He showed and practiced the way to peacefully overcome one of the great injustices, apartheid, of modern times. I sincerely hope, that the spirit in which Mandela made this statement will fill the rooms of your house and will guide you in shaping the new inclusive Bolivia you want.

And may I add, that I hope that this spirit will not be limited to your house in La Paz, but that it will also take root in the various regions of your country.

Meanwhile, the Foundation has also become an active resource center within similar organizations and initiatives within the Andean region, sharing lessons in how to facilitate the consolidation of democracy and the political parties as its component parts.

This year, your country is celebrating 25 years of democracy at a period in which the last elections have transformed the political landscape in your country. You are back at the drawing board within the constituent assembly to redefine the relations between the state and the citizens with the objective to guarantee all Bolivians their political and socio-economic rights and to recognize the diversity of your peoples within one nation based on commonly shared values by all Bolivians. This is a historic task which is a shared responsibility of all political actors within Bolivia.

In the meetings with the political parties and movements during my current visit, many of you have told me that the Foundation is playing an important role in bringing people together, in building bridges, in injected ideas into the debates, to ensure that this historic opportunity to cement the nation and to improve the performance of your democracy is utilized as best as possible. I hope that this new house will make this function of the Foundation even more instrumental in building trust among political adversaries to realize a shared vision about the new Bolivia.

An opening is not complete without a small present. On behalf of the Dutch political parties cooperating within the NIMD, I like to present a small gift to the Foundation. It is symbolic for the pressures of time for change but also to remind us that we need to take time for reforms to be properly discussed and internalized in order to be sustainable.

Recognizing the leadership and dedication towards the Foundation's objectives, I like to invite Guido Riveros, Guti, Rosario, Javier and Edwin to come forward to receive this NIMD gift.

Thank you very much!