

Introduction at the 5th anniversary of the Foro of political parties in Guatemala

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by

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I am privileged to address you this evening at the first lustrum of the Foro of political parties. It is a happy occasion because the establishment of the Foro was an important breakthrough in the role political parties accepted in consolidating the peace and democracy in your country and the Foro has gained a significant place in the peaceful evolution of your political system.

As I may recall, the Foro came into existence as a result of the dialogue that the political parties engaged in 2002 that was facilitated by the OAS, UNDP and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) which I represent today. That dialogue resulted in the Shared National Agenda that was signed in October 2003 by the Secretaries General of the 21 political parties at the time which outlined the priorities in state reform and public policies in the various sectors for the years to come. Following the sharp divisions in your society, the agreement about the Shared National Agenda was an important statement by the political parties to take joint responsibilities to implement institutional reforms to overcome the cleavages in your society and to make the necessary reforms needed to respond to the challenges of globalization.

The Foro was formed to become the motor for the implementation of the Shared National Agenda and to function as a platform that encourages the institutional development of the political parties as indispensable pillars of a well functioning democracy.

I was present at the signing of the Shared National Agenda ceremony five years ago and have visited Guatemala on several occasions since to reinforce the cooperation between the Foro and the Netherlands institute. Being present again today, it is rewarding to notice the impressive achievements of the Foro during the past five years, realizing that cooperation between political parties was a totally new form of engagement. These achievements include, amongst others:

- The Shared National Agenda has effectively become a, if not the, reference framework for the government policies (together with the MDG targets) and the legislative agenda of the Congress;
- The spirit of cooperation and common responsibility for the performance of democracy, despite the differences between the political parties, has resulted in greater levels of trust that allow for less confrontation and more attention for policy debates, contributing to a more stable political system that is the basis for continuity in policies for sustainable socio-economic development;
- Political parties have focused much more seriously in the development of programs and political platforms that allow for constructive debates on policy options for obtaining the priorities of the Shared National Agenda; During the recent elections, 9 out of 14 political parties has developed a specific political platform and presented to the electorate a program to evaluate for deciding their vote;
- Political parties have also started to invest in the organization of their parties in the different regions of Guatemala resulting in an increased participation in the elections of Guatemalteco's living in the rural areas.

Its appropriate to use this occasion also to extent my congratulations to the political parties as well for the role they have played during the recent elections. Meeting the challenge in offering the voters a programmatic programme gave people the opportunity to make a more informed

choice between parties what represents a major shift in the political practice. It also offers people an opportunity to monitor the performance of the party they have chosen during the next legislature.

The Foro has also encouraged dialogues at the departamental level between the political parties resulting in two Shared Agenda's in the departments of Alta Verapaz and Chimaltenango. Representatives of both departments are present tonight and I like to pay tribute to them for the dialogue initiative they have taken and the agreement they have reached within their departments.

The Foro has established work committees in eleven different issues two are that of women and youth. Both have become important catalyzers for a more active participation of women and youth in the political process of your country. It is essential that their energies and knowledge is harnessed and that their contribution in the political arena will be secured. Whereas the participation of both women and youth has increased in the recent elections, their numbers in representative political functions remains too low in relation to other countries. There continues work to be done.

Ladies and Gentleman, the cooperation between the political parties in Guatemala and those in the Netherlands through the NIMD is part of a growing international network of political parties investing in improving their political systems to make them deliver better, in the institutional development of the individual political parties and in improving the relations between political parties, civil society organizations, the private sector and the media. Today over 150 political parties are involved in 17 countries including Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador and Surinam in the America's with regional cooperation programmes emerging in Central America and in the Andean region. The cooperation that the political parties in Guatemala have established and the framework you agreed in the Shared National Agenda, and the FORO has become an important

example for political parties in other countries. Despite all the work that remains to be done, the Foro and its programs have become exemplary, a best practice, that is shared in many other countries that are working towards strengthening the performance of their democracies.

These achievements are reason for a celebration and for the congratulations of the political parties which I represent tonight. But in democracy, there is never reason for complacency, on the contrary. As Nelson Mandela said after successfully replacing apartheid by democracy in South Africa: *we climbed the hill only to discover that after that hill there was another hill and another again.* Each milestone reached is the beginning of the next stage in the journey through history. So let us also look forward tonight to some of the challenges the Foro is facing during the next years:

- Improve the public perception about political parties and to generate greater trust in the functioning of the political system;
- Continue to invest in the organizational and programmatic development of the political parties also extending into the regions in the country;
- Invest in the dialogue between political parties, civil society, private sector and media;
- Build organic relations between the political parties and the Congress to facilitate the necessary reforms as agreed in the Shared National Agenda.

It is important to recall that the new President-elect Mr Alvaro Colom, has asked for the institutionalization of the Foro, indicating how he values the work of the Foro. The support of the new government and the Congress are extremely important for the implementation of the priorities of the Foro. Again, my profound congratulations with your achievements during the first five years and my best wishes to deepen the results in the coming five years. NIMD looks forward to remain your partner in this process for the years to come as will be expressed in the Letter of Intent that we shall sign together today.

Muchas gracias!