



Kofi Annan's Remarks to the Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria

February 28, 2014

"Electoral Integrity and Deepening Democracy Worldwide"

1. President Fischer, distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen.
2. Thank you for your warm welcome
3. Nane and I have always enjoyed our visits to Vienna- an international city and major headquarters for the United Nations.
4. As Secretary General, I often cited Austria as a model member State, for it participated fully in all the key activities of the UN- peacekeeping, development, humanitarian and disarmament.
5. Austria also paid its dues in full and on time.
6. I am pleased that it is an invitation from the Foreign Policy and the United Nations Association of Austria that brings me to this Chamber.
7. Associations like yours serve as an essential link between the UN and the people, and remind citizens of the nature and complexity of today's interdependent world, and the essential need for effective international cooperation.
8. As someone who has always believed that the UN must be closer to the people, I cannot but support and applaud your efforts.
9. Today, I would like discuss the need to deepen democracy and improve the integrity of elections worldwide.
10. This is a fitting location for such a discussion.
11. Many governments continue to lurch from one political crisis to another.
12. Short-term vision, reactionary policies, and growing political polarization have undermined their ability to serve their people.
13. But Austria has a robust democracy, and in this Chamber, disparate voices work together to realize democracy's unique potential for all Austrians.

14. Ladies and gentlemen, since 2000, all but eleven of the world's countries have held elections at either the local or national level.
15. This year alone, over forty percent of the world's population will have a chance to vote in democratic elections.
16. I find great promise and comfort in that fact.
17. Yet elections by themselves are not sufficient to build cohesive and healthy societies.
18. I shall return to this point later in the discussion.
19. Even here in Europe, a continent of established democracies, where free and fair elections are the norm, there is a disconnect.
20. Confidence in elected leaders is low.
21. Mistrust between governing institutions and citizens is high, particularly as public expectations for growth and prosperity are unmet.
22. Insecurity over jobs, the economy, and the future shape of the EU have increased polarization amongst and within EU member states.
23. Mutual cooperation and healthy public debate is in short supply in many European political fora.
24. Unfortunately, these trends are mirrored worldwide.
25. Organised protests from Thailand to Venezuela indicate that something is wrong with our political institutions, and that political leaders are not effectively managing the expectations of the electorate.
26. I therefore believe we need an urgent debate about the state of democracy worldwide, and to address the weaknesses and gaps in democratic institutions.
27. Democracy after all, is not a goal, but a continuous endeavour to strengthen institutions, improve the well-being of people, and foster long-term vision for the country.
28. Elections are the indispensable root of democracy, they are the legitimate mechanism to manage transfers of power peacefully.
29. However, too often, elections are manipulated, flawed, or used to confer a degree of legitimacy to authoritarian regimes.
30. In order to understand the political challenges surrounding elections, I convened the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security.

31. Our final report argues that for an election to be conducted with integrity, it must “be based on democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality; and be professional, impartial and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.”
32. When elections are conducted with integrity, voters elect their leaders and can hold them to account.
33. They are more likely to produce elected officials who will represent the people’s interests.
34. As a result, they can be instrumental in improving governance, ensuring stability, and furthering human development.
35. But when elections lack integrity, citizens are denied their fundamental right to participate in the political process.
36. Elected officials lack legitimacy, and citizens’ confidence in institutions of governance is reduced.
37. Elections that lack transparency can increase apathy and encourage citizens to seek other avenues for political change.
38. The Commission identified five major obstacles that need to be overcome in order to conduct elections with integrity.
39. We must strengthen the rule of law;
40. Governments must build professional, competent and impartial Electoral Management Bodies, with full independence of action;
41. We must also create institutions and norms of multiparty competition that bolster democracy as a mutual security system among political contenders; (reduce winner-takes-all politics )
42. In too many countries, barriers to universal and equal political participation must be overcome; and
43. We must regulate uncontrolled, undisclosed, and opaque political finance.
44. Let me reflect on some measures which I believe are necessary to deepen democracy and promote elections with integrity.
45. First, democracy depends on an assurance that citizens are equal under the law, and enjoy its protection.

46. Therefore, during elections, strong and independent courts must uphold the equal rights of all parties, candidates and citizens, and ensure they have legal redress to electoral disputes.
47. Citizens must know that violators of electoral law will be prosecuted, and that contested results can be examined transparently by an impartial and independent judiciary.
48. Regrettably, in too many places we have seen that, when the rule of law is absent, candidates can be persecuted, electoral laws can be manipulated, and citizens feel they can forsake the ballot box in favour of the street.
49. However, the impression cannot, and should not, be created that the street is an alternative to elections.
50. Such a development will cause more problems than it solves.
51. Unfortunately, in, Egypt, Ukraine and other places, we see this troubling development take hold, with people taking to the streets in order to effect change.
52. Of course, in many of these countries, fundamental human rights are not being respected.
53. Which is why it is imperative to strengthen the rule of law.
54. We must do more to ensure that governments commit to well-defined principles, standards, rights and rules on behalf of conducting elections with integrity.
55. Second, the degree to which an election is *perceived* to be free and fair can shape the overall integrity of the process.
56. Citizens must therefore be confident that elections have been organized in a professional, competent and transparent manner.
57. Strong Electoral Management Bodies are crucial to manage transfers of power in a non-violent manner- they ensure that elections confer legitimacy on the winner, but also provide political and physical security for the loser.
58. But further efforts to reform institutions and promote policies to discourage the 'winner-takes-all' approach to politics are necessary.
59. These should include educating citizens in the norms and processes of multiparty democracy and the values of pluralism.
60. No-one is born a good democrat, and no one is born a good citizen.
61. It takes training, practice, and patience.

62. I have great faith in our next generation of political leaders.
63. Young people are aware of the challenges we face, and engaged in finding solutions.
64. So we must ensure that young people are given the education and skills to accept the mantle of leadership.
65. We must empower them with knowledge about the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship, and ensure they play an active role in their society.
66. A healthy democracy enables and draws strength from interaction among peoples and between peoples and their governments.
67. It requires informed discussion on salient issues, and a willingness to listen to new ideas.
68. And it requires broad participation.
69. So third, we must promote policies to increase the participation of women, young people and other traditionally marginalized groups, such as the disabled.
70. Fourth, we must examine the crucial role of the media.
71. Media should inform and engage, and hold politicians to account for their actions and decisions.
72. Too often however, the media encourages rather than challenges extreme political rhetoric and positions.
73. And when we fixate on normal political differences, they appear as deep societal divides, which further restricts our ability to debate and compromise.
74. Meanwhile, media monopolies, or influence by biased stakeholders, can create an imbalanced playing field during election campaigning.
75. So we need to foster an independent and free media, plural in ownership and voice, to inform voters and help them make important choices.
76. There is one further, challenge which I believe greatly undermines the integrity of elections and impairs democracy- opaque political finance.
77. Vote buying and bribery of candidates are obvious examples of the dangers in this area, as are the vast amounts of money from undisclosed sources which feed electoral campaigns.
78. These create the impression of undue influence of wealthier corporations and individuals in politics.
79. As inequality increases, this issue will only become more relevant.

80. Evidence also points to a more dangerous trend – the penetration of politics by Organised Crime.
81. This highlights the need for stricter regulations on political donations and expenditures, greater transparency in public and private financing of political campaigns, and legal systems capable of enforcing and implementing campaign finance regulations.
82. Ladies and Gentlemen, while elections are inherently national affairs, regional or international organizations and partners can play a role in promoting elections with integrity.
83. In doing so, we must remember that elections are only one part of a longer political process.
84. Effective engagement therefore needs to occur throughout the electoral cycle, not just in the weeks or months before the vote.
85. Similarly, follow-up to elections should not focus on technical aspects, but aim to develop, over the long-term, the institutions, participation and dialogue necessary to deepen democracy.
86. Let me conclude by returning to a point I raised briefly at the beginning of my remarks; that elections by themselves are not sufficient for the development of robust, healthy and democratic societies.
87. I am convinced that such societies are built on three pillars: peace and stability, development, and rule of law and respect for human rights.
88. For there can be no long term development without peace and stability and there can be no stability without development.
89. And no nation can long remain prosperous or secure without rule or law and respect for human rights.
90. Thank you.