

MEDIA RELEASE

Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security launched

PRETORIA, 4 March 2011

As pro-democracy campaigners take to the streets across the Arab world, and as 19 African countries prepare to hold national elections this year, an international initiative to promote the integrity of elections is today launched in South Africa.

Recent events in Cote d'Ivoire and elsewhere have highlighted more clearly than ever that elections are vital to democratic government, but they are not sufficient. Too often, we see incumbents rig the elections, illicit funding or media bias distort the electoral process, and losing candidates refuse to accept the results. Where elections are marred in these ways, people lose faith in democracy and the political process, and human rights and security are put at risk.

The Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, jointly created by the International Institute for Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Kofi Annan Foundation, is made up of 12 eminent individuals from around the world, including Kofi Annan, Ernesto Zedillo, Martti Ahtisaari, Madeleine Albright and Amartya Sen. It aims to highlight the importance of the integrity of elections to achieving a more secure, prosperous and stable world.

The Global Commission will work to convince different stakeholders why elections with integrity matter not just for democracy, but also for security, human rights, and development. At the heart of the Commission's approach is ensuring that the international community applies political solutions to the political problems surrounding elections, rather than purely technical approaches.

It aims to help:

- raise the costs for those who seek to rig and steal elections, and to insure that when elections take place, the potential for abuse and violence are reduced;
- strengthen international commitment to the professional conduct of elections, including supporting high-quality, credible electoral monitoring;
- bolster international support for stronger national capacity to run fair elections;
- reduce the potential for abuse and election-related violence;
- build international consensus to stand firm in cases where parties try to steal elections.

"Building democracy is a complex process. Elections are only a starting point but if their integrity is compromised, so is the legitimacy of democracy," said Kofi Annan, Chairman of the Global Commission. "Most countries have agreed to principles that would, if respected, lead to credible electoral processes, but too often these principles are ignored because of lack of political commitment, insufficient technical knowledge or inadequate international support. The Commission will therefore seek to renew political commitment to the integrity of the electoral process."

"We have learnt from experience elsewhere," remarked Vidar Helgesen, the Secretary General of IDEA, "that democracy is not what you find in the pot when you take the lid off heavy authoritarian

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government. Building sustainable democracy therefore is not a technical exercise but one that requires political leadership and commitment at national and international levels."

"The Commission will draw its strength from having no national agenda," added Vice-Chair Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, former President of Mexico. "Its members all have a track record in integrity and commitment to democracy, and their high profile on the world stage will give it unique credibility and influence."

The Commission expects to conclude its work and present its recommendations by the end of 2012.

Notes to Editors:

The members of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security are:

Chair: Kofi Annan

Vice Chair: Ernesto Zedillo

Members:

- Martti Ahtisaari
- Madeleine Albright
- Louise Arbour
- Rima Khalaf Hunaidi
- Festus Mogae
- Amartya Sen
- Javier Solana
- Vaira Vike-Freiberga
- Hassan Wirajuda

Friends of the Commission:

- Helen Clark
- Lynn Pascoe

Ex-officio member:

- Vidar Helgesen

Research Director:

- Steve Stedman

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