



20th Anniversary Commemorative event, 16 September 2015

SG Yves Leterme – Welcome remarks

Your Royal Highness, Mister Speaker, Ministers, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I bid you all a warm welcome in my turn, I would like to sincerely thank the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, the *Riksdagens Talman*, *Mister Urban Ahlin*, for his most encouraging words and his hospitality. It is both a pleasure and a privilege for International IDEA to be hosted in this glorious building, on this important occasion.

Today, I am honored and delighted by the presence of Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Victoria, and I look forward to the words of our distinguished keynote speaker: His Excellency, Mr Kofi Annan. Mr Annan is Chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation and was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1997 to 2006, a period marked by democratic transitions in numerous countries around the world.

Allow me also to extend my gratitude to the Ministers and representatives of International IDEA's Member States, and especially to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Sweden, Mrs Margot Wallström. Minister Margot Wallström has been a tremendous supporter of IDEA and its mission over many years, including serving a term on the organization's Advisory Board. She is a true supporter of all that Democracy means. This is reflected in brave, principled and often inspiring policies and committed action carried out throughout the world.

And – Ministers, Excellencies, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am also delighted that you *all* are here today, to participate and share with us this commemoration the 20th Anniversary of International IDEA. In the name of the Institution and on behalf of my colleagues, I wish you a warm welcome.

Anniversaries like this provide the opportunity both to look back and to look forward.

Allow me to briefly recall the time of IDEA's birth in 1995. Our organization's history has been written down by my predecessor, the pioneer and first Secretary-General of International IDEA Mr Bengt Säve-Söderbergh, in an excellent essay which I recommend to you.

The start of International IDEA came about in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, the breakthrough of democratic governance in Latin America, the end of the military regime in South Korea and the end of Apartheid in South-Africa in 1994. Those times were colored by an impressive increase of the number of nations governed by elected parliaments and governments which were accountable to the people. It was a period of optimism about the Liberal Multiparty Democracy as the final form of government. I am sure that you will remember Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of History' or the concept of the *Third wave of Democratization* by Samuel Huntington. Democracy, it was believed, would save the world and all its citizens from violence, poverty and bad governance.

Sweden was among the first countries to argue the need for the reinforcement of independent international institutions in support of democracy and elections. The United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe were looking to broaden their scope in the field of democracy support. Many initiatives were undertaken, but it was finally agreed that a new intergovernmental institution was needed to fill the gap beyond election observation.

Against this backdrop, the Swedish government recognized the need for a balanced, politically neutral organization that would support democratization and civil society – in a non-prescriptive manner and with a broader focus than on elections themselves.

The International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance – International IDEA - was launched on 27 February 1995 in Stockholm by 14 member States, as an intergovernmental

organization. Since then, the mandate of IDEA has remained unchanged: *to support and sustain democracy worldwide.*

20 years after the End of History, with more than 400 targeted publications and having implemented effective assistance programs in some 40 different countries around the globe, we have a more nuanced view. We now recognize that democracy is permanently challenged and never fully achieved or guaranteed for the future.

But, importantly, the direct link between democracy and sustainable development has proved to be irrefutable. This crucial principle will be particularly underscored by the UN General Assembly, next week in New York.

Since 1995, the number of Member States has more than doubled. And International IDEA is now a leading organization in the field of electoral assistance, of constitution building and of improvements to representative democracy.

And yesterday, during the Council meeting here in Stockholm, the Member States of International IDEA recognized the achievements of the past 20 years and adopted a Declaration, renewing their support and reaffirming their ambitions for International IDEA for the next 20 years and beyond.

Your Royal Highness, Honored guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have the pleasure to introduce to you our keynote speaker for today, Mr Kofi Annan. Mr Annan, as Secretary General of the United Nations you led the effort to bring more democracy and respect for fundamental human rights at a global level and in numerous countries and regions for an entire decade.

Who else, ladies and gentlemen, is better placed to share with us the most informed and valuable testimonial of the recent history of democracy? Who is better placed to give the international and global community both informed guidance and an enlightened vision on the way ahead?

Mr Annan, International IDEA has had the privilege of working closely together with you on the Global Commission and we support the work of the Kofi Annan Foundation of which you are the Chair.

We consider you to be a great friend of International IDEA and I am very happy and proud to give you the floor for your key note address.