



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE TO FIFTH HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF THE INTER-REGIONAL
DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY**
Addis Ababa, 15-16 October 2015

Delivered by Mr. Haile Menkerios, Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union

It is a pleasure to greet the participants in this High-Level Dialogue on Democracy.

Building democracy in conflict-affected and fragile states is essential for consolidating peace and avoiding cycles of violence. Our shared challenge is to help those states to develop a culture of democracy rooted in human rights, the rule of law and accountable institutions.

In societies affected by violent conflict, there is a need to reconstruct the relationship between citizens and their authorities so that groups that have suffered political, social and economic exclusion feel they have a stake in a country's political system. Designing the necessary institutions is painstaking work but is crucial for restoring public confidence in the state. An important component of this work is ensuring the existence of democratic and credible security sector institutions that can effectively maintain law and order.

Civil society is a key partner for governments. Yet in too many countries, space for civil society is diminishing or disappearing, as Governments have adopted legislation that imposes restrictions on funding and on the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. We must all work together to reverse this trend, protect civil society space and support the right of grassroots organizations to make their contributions.

The United Nations is committed to working with regional and sub-regional organizations in conflict-affected and fragile states to lay the building blocks for peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and sustainable societies. Indeed, when it comes to supporting or defending democracy under threat, regional partners possess very effective response mechanisms. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Inter-American Democratic Charter are two such examples. The African Peer Review Mechanism has also been effective in identifying areas of exclusion that could potentially generate conflict or undermine good governance.

The value of complementarity in multilateral efforts is clear.

In West Africa, the United Nations recently conducted joint good offices or mediation missions with the African Union, ECOWAS and other organizations to defuse tensions in several countries, including Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Togo.

In the Central African Republic, the United Nations has been working with African counterparts – including the international mediator on the CAR crisis, the Economic Community of Central African States and the AU -- to support national dialogue,

reconciliation and the organization of free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections in the coming months.

In East Africa, the United Nations is supporting nation-wide consultations in Somalia aimed at developing an inclusive electoral process for 2016. I look forward to our continued work with the AU and IGAD to advance the process of democratization. In Burundi, the United Nations and AU worked closely with the East African Community at the peak of the pre-electoral crisis to facilitate a political dialogue. These efforts continue.

Looking ahead, we should all be encouraged that democracy figures prominently in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was just adopted by Member States -- including through Goal 16 on building peaceful societies and inclusive institutions. Your continued engagement will be important in ensuring transparency, accountability and the availability of data.

I will count on your organizations to be active partners in helping fragile and conflict-affected societies find the path of lasting peace. Please accept my best wishes for a successful dialogue.