

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
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ON PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY- THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE
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**Mr. Chairman
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to join you at this World Congress of the International Press Institute. I would like to convey my appreciation to the organizers of the Congress, and particularly to the IPI Chairman, Mr. Wilfred Kiboro, for extending this gracious invitation to me, and for availing an opportunity of sharing my thoughts on the subject of “Pluralism and Democracy – The African Experience”.

Distinguished participants,

You are professionals whose daily output has provided us a window for viewing the world as it daily unfolds. Your perspectives have influenced our judgement of success and failure. Your narratives have exposed challenges and opportunities in many of our societies. I do hope, you would therefore understand a certain degree of trepidation one may develop in talking to people of your vocation on a subject such as this. Unlike many of us, you have witnessed the concrete materialization of the makings or un-makings of democracy and plural development in this Continent from a somewhat vantage position.

The trepidation is further compounded by the fact that democracy and pluralism are issues that have been subjected to prolific writing by renowned scholars and laureates in a number of forums. And when it comes to capturing the African experience, one only has to open the editorial of any newspaper in this Continent and also proceed to the reader’s forum! And as I was preparing for this address, I also learnt that the issues of democracy and pluralism were given an insightful elucidation in previous IPI congresses, including the last one in Salzburg.

of institutionalized conflict and alienation of the majority could be reconstituted in a sustainable manner by democracy and pluralism.

X We enter the 21st Century not only with ^{COUNTRIES LIKE} Botswana ^{AND SENE GAL} and Mauritius being the celebrated cases of sustainable democratic systems, but the process of institutionalized competitive systems has thrived to a point of having new parties and party coalitions taking over the leadership of government in a number of countries. Indeed, one can boldly observe that remarkable progress has been achieved in establishing the instruments of democratic and pluralistic development in our Continent. We have done remarkably well in establishing the architecture for the functioning of democratic processes and pluralistic relations in our countries. The extent to which these instruments and this architecture guarantee an enjoyment of the fundamental goals of democracy and pluralism to the African peoples, constitute one of the most important development challenges for Africa today.

The full engagement of the people as a whole in the determination of national destiny beyond the five-yearly casting of the vote; ensuring a continuous and effective accountability of leaders and representatives to their respective constituencies, and also the guaranteeing of sufficient degree of transparency in all aspects of the public policy process are parameters which need working on in a number of our systems.

Furthermore, the denial of a leveled playing field, which provides equal opportunity for the political party in power as well as for the opposition, has been a major area of concern. In the same regard, the use of electoral offices for personal or parochial interest has tended to undermine the very integrity of these offices and the whole prevalent architecture established in the name of democracy. In the name of freedom of association and interest articulation desperate self-interest has driven some politicians to exploit ethnic, regional and religious identities as a basis for mobilization.

Compounding these discrepancies are the values and norms which underpin political relations and governance practices. For democracy and pluralism to succeed, a conscious attempt has to be made in developing a national ethos which encompasses the whole society. This serves as the bond of the nation, being larger than both individual citizens as well as their constituent groups. Whatever the diversities that may exist in a country, the national ethos should serve as an integrative mechanism that unifies within diversity. Indeed, it embodies the nation as a whole as well as its people.

Political relations for a democratic and pluralistic dispensation need to be guided by a culture of dialogue, a culture of tolerance, and indeed on the rule of law. Tolerance applies not only to respecting and appreciating our social and cultural differences, but equally the differences in our affiliation to political parties. We need to learn to disagree without being disagreeable and becoming permanent enemies. There should be no claims of some to be more patriotic than others simply on the basis of the divergent views they may hold on the destiny of our societies. We need to maintain mutual respect among all citizens. Politics of confrontation; superiority-inferiority complexes that are coupled with discriminative attitudes; and absence of equitable justice; are all an anathema to the prevalence of democracy, even if the architecture is all-present. We have witnessed to our utter dismay African countries with a promising future losing all that they achieved for decades, due to the failure in sustaining the cardinal values of a democratic culture.

A related challenge for the thriving of democracy and pluralism in Africa – and this constitute my third proposition - relates to the linkage with development and improvement of human welfare. For as long as the people do not notice an improvement in their daily lives, then democratic development loses its meaning and remains suspended as a porous superstructure.

As I see it,

Two aspects of the linkage between democracy and development have proved to be critical in the African experience ~~as I see it~~. One, is how the policy process is driven by democratic norms, thus ensuring a satisfactory response to the needs and demands of the people, and to the scope of choices and options availed to them, as well the manner in which public resources are allocated are expended. A plural and democratic system of governance not only puts in the forefront the concerns of the people in terms of their needs, demands and choices, but it also allows for the unleashing and deployment of their energy and creativity through engaging them fully in overcoming challenges. In the specific African context, the degree to which systems of governance address the poverty challenge has a greater bearing to legitimacy of democracy for the people.

The second linkage aspect for democracy and development involves the manner in which rights and responsibilities are included among the development outputs for the benefit of the people and how such rights are enforced. Denial of basic and affordable rights, or their selective application

oftentimes tends to jeopardize the sustainability of democracy. In this connection, a terrifying demon of corruption has to be fought vigorously because it is one of the debasing device of denying and violating the people's rights. It denies and violates rights not only when demanded in exchange of legitimate rights, it is even more destructive when used in distorting democratic processes.

Once again, a broad overview of the African landscape tend to suggest that the deepening of democracy and its operationalization through the policy process constitute urgent challenges that Africa is faced with in this new century. There is evidence to indicate that the institutional reform processes that are taking place all over the Continent are pointing towards the direction of enhancing this linkage.

My fourth and final proposition, which I will highlight very briefly, is that democracy and pluralism as concurrent pursuits are also a Pan-African agenda. Indeed, in 1990, the then OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted a stance that proclaimed the challenge of ensuring peace, security and stability as a collective responsibility of all African people and their leadership. Bold collective measures have been taken since that time, which have had a positive impact in changing the Continental political culture. Recent developments in Togo are good illustration of Africa's internalizing this new culture. Hardly 12 hours elapsed, when Africa, in one voice, ~~could~~^{ecol} strongly reproach/an imposed leader, compelling him to fall into order in abiding by constitutional procedures. This had happened before in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, ~~Central African~~
X ~~Republic (?)~~, and the Comoros. Right now, the Constitutive Act of the African Union has enshrined democratic principles for the Continental body politic.

All I am trying to suggest in these four propositions, and this constitutes my conclusion, is that Africa subscribes to the universality of democratic goals. Over the last two decades, due to the incomplete nature of the project of nation building in the early period of independence, many countries have had also to grapple with confronting the challenge of transforming the rich diversity into a bedrock of strength rather than allowing it to degenerate into a source of weakness. We are beginning to triumph over these dual challenges, though there are still hurdles to be overcome. At the stage we have reached, stronger attention is being given into translating the democratic achievements so far gained into improvements of the peoples'

welfare. In this overall project, the whole of Africa has reaffirmed its commitment to pursue a collective approach.

Without preempting your deliberations, I do believe that the media both, global and African, has an important role to play in promoting democratic and plural^{istic} development in Africa. After all, it is both a beneficiary and an enabler for the thriving of democracy in any society. Not only does it contribute to fostering unity within diversity, but it also is an instrument for engendering and expressing the richness of diversity. In this role, the media can constructively create bridges; promote harmony and understanding; as well as contribute to the leveling of the playing field. Unfortunately, there have been tragic cases where sections of the media abdicated from this noble role, ~~and went hell-bent into sowing seeds of discord, generating hatred and hostility, and even contributing to manipulating democratic processes.~~ I leave it to you in reflecting on ways of enhancing the positive contribution the media can continue to make in fostering democracy and pluralism in Africa.

I thank you!

AND IN THE PROCESS HAVE CONTRIBUTED INTO SOWING SEEDS OF DISCORD, GENERATING HATRED AND HOSTILITY IN CERTAIN INSTANCES EVEN CONTRIBUTING TO MANIPULATING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES.

I almost said, what new insight could one add to all those voices. However, since it is such a rare opportunity to engage with opinion makers of your distinguished quality, I thought I should try to extract from my personal experience of the past ^{MANY} ~~4~~ years; mainly working with my national government; in the United Nations; and with the then Organisation of African Unity for ~~12~~ ^{FOUR} as the Secretary General before its transformation into the African Union. ^{L TWELVE YEARS}

From that experience, I would like to submit ~~4~~ major propositions for your reflection.

The first one: whereas the genesis of democracy, both as a process and as an end ~~it~~ itself, is associated with a historical endeavour to accommodate the dynamics of pluralism, – in the case of Africa, there has been a disjuncture between the two. The logic of democratic development has not necessarily synchronized with the logic of pluralistic development. The two processes, as they appear today, did not start in tandem.

The implication of this proposition is that in the African experience the linkage between democracy and pluralism cannot be assumed as a given. There are situations, even under the present conjuncture, where non-pluralistic democratic development has been promoted, in all earnest. Therefore, in order to gain progress, deliberate efforts have to be made in promoting and consolidating democracy concurrently with pluralistic development. The experience of post-independence Africa does indicate that a failure to acknowledge and rectify the disjuncture between the agenda for democracy and pluralism might have contributed significantly to the prolongation of conflict and instability in the last decades. It might also have played a role in rendering the democratic institutions to remain fragile in some parts of the Continent.

Africa gained independence in the 1960s at a time when the prevailing democratic doctrine that informed political thinking and practice was democracy being a dominant power of the majority of the people in a society. While not denied of their basic rights, the minority had always to yield and defer to the will of the majority. Earlier on, it was this ideology of 'majoritarianism' that legitimized and underlay the struggle for independence and nationalism. And subsequently, the democratic models transposed from the respective colonial antecedents largely informed the process of institution building in the first decades of independence.

Election, representation, separation of power, and dominance of the public sphere were considered as the main fundamentals of democratic existence. The State was taken as an embodiment of the collective existence of a society and its popular will.

At that time, the new African leadership was conscious of the specter of African diversity and its complexity - particularly relating to the primordial identities of ethnicity, regionalism, religion and even race in some cases. In the absence of a fully developed national identity, the greatest fear at that early period of independence was the threat of national disintegration along the fault lines of prevailing social and political diversities. The solution for the new leadership was to develop a binding sense of national unity which submerged all differences. This was the time of the rise of the single party and military dictatorships that were all justified on the grounds of protecting and sustaining national unity.

The point I am trying to make here is that the initial response to Africa's confronting its rich diversity in the post-independence period was not a pluralistic socio-political culture. Rather, it was the type of a binding integrative unity. In this context, a minimum of latitude was provided for articulating the specificities of needs and choices; divergences were discouraged; a singular identity was promoted; and in a few cases, only what was referred to as 'inner-party democracy' was restrictively permitted. The State was the prime mover of development.

The bequeathed doctrine of democracy focused on controls by the State; and politics was mediated through selective representation. Democracy, in this case referred to the dominance of the majority. And despite subscribing to the principle of separation of powers, the dominance of the majority and its repercussions in constituting the organs of government, often tended to weaken the checks and balances that this principle entails. Invariably, the executive arm of governance tended to remain dominant; not only in relations with the other organs, but also with the spheres of civil society as well as the private sector where it existed.

This brings me to my second proposition. Remarkable progress has been achieved in Africa's quest to build democracy and pluralism, particularly in the last two decades.

From around 1990 till today, in a short span of 15 years, one sees a complete transformation in the African political landscape. From a pattern that was dominated by the monopolized politics of single-party governments and military regimes, the scene has completely changed to multi-party electoral systems with some of the attendant structures for democratic governance. Almost all African countries have adopted constitutional provisions allowing for the functioning of divergent articulation of interests. Systems have been put in place for regular and competitive elections. The previous fusion of party with state has been rectified in many places, through clearly separating the key organs of government. Political parties have been reassigned to their traditional role of serving as vehicles for a higher-level aggregation of interests and preferences of the citizens.

X One cannot fail to notice the emergence of a new political culture in Africa over ^{THESE FIFTEEN} ~~the last 15~~ years. Proportional representation and the formation of governments of national unity are increasingly becoming a political option of choice in a number of countries. Large amounts of resources are expended for extensive consultations on a constitutional order that can effectively represent the will of the people. In countries such as mine – Tanzania – public resources are allocated to qualified opposition parties for sustaining their day-to-day activities and for contesting elections. There is a ~~relative~~ ^{CONSIDERABLE} increase in the space and role of the media; and subjects that were previously considered as a taboo can now be discussed with relative openness. One can list many more achievements along these lines.

X Indeed, it is true that it was at this same 15 years that I am associating with progress, when the Continent witnessed the most ignominious and X horrendous occurrence associated with our ^{RECENT} history – the genocide of Rwanda. One of the most extensive and damaging wars – that of the Congo was fought during this period. However, it was also this time when the most recalcitrant conflicts began to abate and the guns of war began to go silent.

X I would like to suggest that the ending of the civil wars in Angola; in ^{SOUTHERN} ~~the~~ Sudan, Mozambique, Liberia, ^{AND} Sierra Leone, Guinea underlined the importance of the democratic and pluralistic dispensation as the most effective means of maintaining peace, security and stability in the Continent. The harmony and tranquility sustained in post-apartheid South Africa, is a powerful testimony of Africa coming of age in sustaining the democratic and pluralistic dispensation even when it is against the greatest of odds. Decades