

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery at IDASA Dinner, at the
conclusion of the Pretoria Workshop on Promoting the African
Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
by Bob LaGamma, President,
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Honorable Deputy Madame Minister van der Merve, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, honored representatives of African civil society, Mr. Graham and dynamic members of IDASA's staff, Mr. Jonen, representative of the World Movement for Democracy, Roland Rich, Director of the United Nations Democracy Fund who has made this gathering possible, the Secretary General of International IDEA, honored guests.

I am especially pleased to be here in the southern hemisphere as a refugee from Washington winter, the harshest in our history. And I am profoundly pleased to be back in Pretoria where I spent the final years of my diplomatic career during the first years of the new South Africa. That was during the first years of the new South Africa. I was blessed to witness the miracle of the transition from apartheid to freedom, from a society built on racial oppression and separation to a non-racial society, one firmly on the map of the world's democracies.

Our labors during these past days surely take inspiration from the creation of democracy in South Africa. But we find ourselves among an impressive array of leaders of African civil society gathered here seeking to transform their own societies and drawing from the same aspirations for freedom and democracy that drove South Africans.

What I find especially remarkable about this gathering is that it represents a new consciousness, a new awareness. Not so very long ago civil society organizations fighting for human rights and democracy were invariably focused on the problems of their own communities, their own countries. Today we find civil society leaders from Senegal, Rwanda, Burundi, Mali, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Botswana and Kenya joining with South Africans to address their common concerns about the fate of democracy on their continent.

We are witnessing is a new global awareness, an awareness that problems of democracy and human rights in one corner of the world are inextricably connected to those everywhere. We have learned that solutions to problems found here in South Africa may suggest the resolution of similar problems elsewhere. Globalization has made real John Donne's words: "Do not send to ask for whom the bells toll, they toll for thee."

There is no better example of this concept than the work done by IDASA, once focused on South Africa alone and in recent years reaching out to help many beyond its borders. I now have the honor of introducing my good friend and colleague Paul Graham, Executive Director of IDASA, who is also Chairman of the International Steering Committee, the civil society component of the Community of Democracies of which my

organization, the Council for a Community of Democracies serves as Secretariat. **Paul Graham.**

We in the Americas joined together to craft a Charter under the banner of the Organization of American States (OAS) dedicated to consolidating democratic gains on our continent. We are impressed by the efforts of Africans to produce their own charter, one that will help consolidate and expand democratic gains on this continent. As an outsider this Charter we have come together to consider and support can mark a turning point in the history of Africa; a statement of principle of Africans, by Africans and for all the peoples of Africa. To provide you with an understanding of our work in support of the Charter I have the pleasure of introducing Ms. Valnora Edwin, Executive Director of the Campaign for Good Governance from Sierra Leone. Ms. Edwin will present the civil society declaration produced by the workshop participants. **Ms. Edwin.**

The Charter is one of a number of ways in which people around the world have sought to consolidate democracy, often in the face of great challenges. For this same reason, ten years ago, more than 100 democracies met in Warsaw to establish the Community of Democracies. They left Warsaw united in the common belief that the fate of democracy in any one of them was interwoven with all and that all peoples everywhere had the right to democratic institutions. That community will mark its 10th anniversary in July in the ancient Polish city of Krakow where representatives of governments and civil society will meet to explore ways of strengthening and extending democracy.

That makes it especially appropriate that we meet under the flag of South Africa, under the banner of IDASA, in partnership with the World Movement for Democracy and the African Democracy Forum. I am convinced that this array of democratic forces acting together, can move mountains and shape history by providing rights and democratic institutions to the peoples of Africa. The Government of South Africa has served on the Convening Group or governing body of the Community of Democracies for the last decade.

I am honored to present our keynote speaker, the Honorable Sue van der Merve, Deputy Minister for International Relations and Cooperation. Minister van der Merve has represented the ANC in Parliament for the past ten years and came to her position as Deputy Minister in April 2004. Previously she served as an ANC Whip in Parliament and as Parliamentary Counselor to the President. She is a graduate of the University of Cape Town and has worked extensively with civil society including as a member of the famous Black Sash Movement that worked for justice, prior to her election to Parliament. **Deputy Minister van der Merve.**

The work done by civil society in Africa in support of fundamental rights and the establishment of democratic institutions is too little noticed and is often heroic. Do those efforts really matter or are we tilting at windmills? The experience of South Africa and the accomplishments of IDASA give conclusive proof that ordinary citizens can accomplish the extraordinary and alter the course of history. But after remarkable progress, Africa, like much of the world is said to be in a democratic recession. The

recent coup in Niger provides us with an example of that recession. That only makes your work all the more important.

The late Howard Zinn a one time professor of mine and an important democracy activist left us this advice:

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction, and if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

I would conclude my remarks by noting that the need is great, the hour is right, so let us join together to win support for a charter that will set standards for the conduct of nations and provide the peoples of Africa with the rights they so justly deserve.

We are privileged tonight to have with us a man for all seasons, my good friend Roland Rich, Executive Head of the United Nations Democracy Fund. In that capacity he is responsible for making this workshop possible. Mr. Rich hails from Australia which he represented as a diplomat. He later served as an academic at the Australian National University. During that period he wrote about and was active in promoting democratic ideas. I can imagine no one better able to direct the work of the UN's Democracy Fund than our closing speaker, Roland Rich. **Mr. Rich.**

Our work is not over with this workshop. We have one day to go to generate a report on the problems of democracy in Africa that will represent the views of civil society to the governments of the Community of Democracies. After that labor I wish you all good travels and success in implementing the ideas generated here in Pretoria.

Let me conclude with one final wish: Go Bafana, Bafana! (South Africa's national soccer team).