

Welcoming Remarks
By: Paul Graham
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Promoting the African Union Charter
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Friends,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this evening's dinner. It is the culmination of a vigorous two day consultation between important civil society bodies in Africa on ways to ensure ratification of the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

In inviting you tonight we have therefore two goals in mind:

- ② Celebration of the achievements of Africa in developing the charter and the achievements of a substantial body of civil society in continuing to flourish and take initiatives for development despite difficult circumstances, and
- ② Promotion of a growing campaign for ratification.

I hope that you will find the company at your table congenial and useful in both these goals.

I am particularly pleased to welcome the Deputy Minister and to convey to her and her Minister and their staff our encouragement in continuing to work for peace and security on the continent. It is the contention of the Charter that peace and security are necessary for democracy but also that democracy is necessary to ensure peace and security within and between states in the longer run.

This evening would not have been possible without the partnership of all the organisations listed on the back of your programmes as well as the contribution of those on the cover. I am very appreciative of the work of the Council for the Community of Democracies and the African Democracy Forum, and especially glad that we could cajole Mr Roland Rich of the UN Democracy Fund to join us in South African for a few days.

The happy co-incidence of a visit by Mr Vidar Helgesen, general secretary of International Idea enables us to congratulate him and his organisation on their contribution to the continent.

In welcoming you all here I am also concluding the two day consultation – I would like to thank all of those who have participated and contributed towards its success. There are those who doubt the capacity and tenacity of substantial civil society organisations on the continent – but here we have committed friends whose contribution to the continent is not inconsiderable.

There are many reasons why we need the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance to be ratified by at least 15 countries. I conclude my welcoming remarks by mentioning only one. Democracy is a contested concept. Unfortunately it has become associated with interests that do not always have the continent's needs and aspirations at heart. The ratification of the charter, drafted by Africans for Africans, will enable us to lay an agreed normative foundation to any future discussion about what we mean when we assert that Africans want democracy – it will be our definition created to meet our interests as Africans, no-one else's.

Welcome once again and enjoy your time together.