



ESTABLISHING A PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

FINAL REPORT

Congress of Democrats
from the Islamic World

Istanbul, Turkey
April 12-15, 2004

I. SUMMARY

For many years a scholarly debate has ensued over the compatibility of democratic principles and Islam. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the debate intensified. Governments, politicians, religious leaders and civil society organizations have drafted papers, attended conferences and listened to the many opinions on this subject.

A growing number of democratic Muslims around the world, however, have been anxious to declare an end to the debate. From Morocco to Turkey to Indonesia, these political leaders point to the numerous examples of predominantly Muslim nations and political parties that are striving for and achieving democratic governance as evidence that Islamic culture and religious practice are compatible with democratic principles. In moving beyond the debate and towards practical governance, these democrats from the Islamic world have been looking for opportunities to establish networks that would help demonstrate their successes in developing effective and modern public policy and have sought support to strengthen their programs and policies. These leaders also understand the valuable example they have been setting for their colleagues in other Islamic countries that have been less enthusiastic about adopting democratic principles and processes, and hope that by demonstrating their own success stories, they might attract the interest and following of others.

In April 2004, over 70 political leaders from 14 predominantly Muslim countries accomplished these objectives by declaring an end to the debate over the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Assembled in Istanbul, Turkey for the first Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World, delegates set clear benchmarks for enhanced democratization by calling for accountable political parties, multiparty elections administered by independent election commissions, independent media, freedom of information, equal political participation by women and oversight of governments by parliaments and civil society.

Democratic practitioners gathered from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East discussed a wide-range of issues including the role of a democratic rule of law in Islamic societies; strategies for increasing the involvement of women and youth in political life; and means of strengthening relationships between political organizations and civil society (*see Appendix A: Congress Agenda*). From these discussions, the Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World (*see Appendix B*) was issued at the conclusion of the Congress that reflected the consensus of the delegates and emphasized key principles of democratic governance including tolerance, justice and participation.

The Congress, conceived nearly two years ago by a group of leading democratic reformers from predominantly Muslim countries, was sponsored by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Turkish Democracy Foundation, with support from 16 other governments and foundations from the United States, Europe and the Middle East. (*see Appendix D: Complete list of Donors and Sponsors*)

II. BACKGROUND

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there were new and renewed calls, both domestically and internationally, for democratic reforms in predominantly Muslim countries. Many academics and western political leaders were tempted to think that there existed a wall of resistance against democracy within the Islamic world.

In reality, at the time this program was developed, progress towards reform in the Islamic world had been moving at a faster pace than ever, with new achievements realized every day. Yemen had recently held multi-party parliamentary elections, and its independent legislature now has representation from five competing political parties and several independent candidates. In Morocco, greater democracy led to the recent election of 35 women to parliament and improvements in school enrollment and children's health care. The Indonesian government instituted far-reaching constitutional reform that provides for direct election of the president and vice-president for the first time. In Bahrain the Supreme Council for Women announced a plan for increased women's participation and rights in that country. An unprecedented multi-partisan balance of authority held power in Mali's National Assembly following the country's first peaceful transfer of power in 2002. In Turkey, a party whose leadership is committed to the tenets of democracy has implemented far reaching initiatives to promote greater openness and accountability in the political process. And in Jordan a multi-dimensional reform strategy focuses on economic, judicial, social and – most importantly – political reforms.

The loudest and most effective voices for democracy in predominantly Muslim countries have been those of the people and there is broad support among the citizens of the Islamic world for democratic governance. In an analysis of World Values Surveys, 87 percent of respondents from predominantly Muslim countries favored democracy as a form of government and a 2003 Pew Global Attitudes survey found that majorities in nine predominately Muslim nations surveyed support democratic values and believe that democracy can work in their countries.

Recognizing these accomplishments and strong support for democratic reform among citizens, key democratic leaders from around the Islamic world were looking for an opportunity to demonstrate their successes to a skeptical world, benefit from the experiences of fellow reformers facing similar challenges in other countries and chart a clear path for continued reform throughout the Islamic world.

III. ACTIVITIES

Planning and Organization

Planning for the program began at a series of advisory meetings, first in Frankfurt and later in Istanbul. The following participants attended these early discussions:

Mr. Luis Ayala
Secretary General of Socialist International

Dr. Mehmet Aydin
Minister of State for Religious Affairs of Turkey

Mr. Hans Van Baalen
Vice President of Liberal International

Mrs. Anna Maria Stame Cervone
Representative before the UN for Christian Democrat and People's Party International

Dr. Muhaimin Iskandar
Deputy Speaker of the DPR

Mr. Emre Kocaoglu
President of the Turkish Democracy Foundation

Hon. Zlatko Lagumdzija
Former Prime Minister of Bosnia, President, Social Democratic Party

These colleagues asked that NDI, in concert with other international organizations, facilitate an opportunity for them to gather like-minded democratic leaders from predominantly Muslim countries with democratic attributes.

Continued discussion at these meetings included setting an agenda for the Congress, drafting the list of invited delegates, (*see Appendix C: Delegates and Participants*) drafting an early version of what later became the Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World and discussing the strategy to ensure that regional and international media outlets reported on the Congress and the efforts made by individual delegates. The participants at the planning meetings became the critical core of the Congress Advisory Committee, which played an active role in convening the Congress and a visible role in the Congress proceedings and media outreach.

Requests for support of the Congress were met with widespread enthusiasm. Nineteen governments and international organizations and foundations contributed financially towards the program. This multinational base of support was an important indication of donors' commitment to democratic political leaders in Muslim countries

and prevented skeptics from portraying the Congress as the innovation of any one country.

The initial framework of the Platform was distributed to delegates in advance of the Congress. Individually and in meetings of delegates from each country, they considered the text in the context of their own democratic accomplishments and continued reform efforts. Recommendations for strengthening the Platform were sent to the Congress Secretariat, which integrated them into a revised draft. This updated version was discussed during the Congress in Istanbul and enthusiastically debated by groups of delegates and a drafting committee with representatives from each geographic region. Consensus was reached on a final draft that was released at the conclusion of the Congress and subsequently translated and disseminated in the seven languages used during the Congress proceedings.

Event Content

Welcoming Remarks

The Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World opened with welcoming remarks from Secretary Madeline Albright, chairman of the National Democratic Institute, Emre Kocaoglu, executive director of the Turkish Democracy Foundation, Dr. Kadir Topbas, mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and Hafiz Pasha, assistant administrator and regional director for the Asia and Pacific United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In his opening remarks, Emre Kocaoglu observed that while this was the first Congress of its kind in the world, the high caliber of delegates and participants as well as the unique challenges which they all face, demonstrate the need for the Congress to be enduring. Mayor Kadir Topas, in his welcoming remarks, said that while Muslims already comprehend that Islam and democracy are inseparable, the future will bring this understanding to the rest of the world.

Congratulating the delegates for their commitment to democratic reform, Secretary Albright, stated that people argue “democracy and Islam are incompatible, but today you are proving them wrong. And you are flat out rejecting the excuse that democracy cannot be accepted because outsiders are trying to impose it upon the Muslim world.” Secretary Albright further remarked that respect for the rights and dignity of every human being is not only central to democracy but also quite consistent with Islam.

Hafiz Pasha noted that a large percentage of predominantly Muslim countries are signatories to international conventions relating to civic and political rights and freedoms. “Adherence to these conventions will require the building of democratic societies.” He stated that the UNDP is committed to implementing programming that supports global democratic governance. Pasha described the process for spreading democracy in the Islamic world as embodied in three vital steps: “It must arise from an indigenous

movement and imperatives and not be imported from the outside. It must be consistent with the history, traditions and culture of a particular country. It must ideally be a peaceful transition based on the realization that democracy fulfils the best aspirations of the people.”

Plenary Presentations

Keynote Address: Cemil Cicek, minister of justice, Turkey

Cemil Cicek, Minister of Justice in Turkey, opened the Congress by declaring that the need for democracy in Islamic societies is critical, likening it to oxygen. He stated that terrorism has nothing to do with the essence of Islam and confirmed that democracy is unique to each society and must be “tailored” accordingly. Cicek also maintained that while democratic values, including human rights and rule of law, remain essential for the Islamic community, the poverty problem that affects many of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims, also needs to be addressed urgently.

Plenary Address: Marwan Muasher, foreign minister of Jordan
(Appendix I)

Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher of Jordan delivered the keynote speech at the April 13th luncheon, sponsored by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation. Focusing his remarks on the Arab world in general and Jordan in particular, Muasher discussed the “Greater Middle East Initiative” in the context of why reforms needed to be proposed and implemented from within. “If content is important, ownership of the process is even more so.” He cited that there exists little disagreement in the Arab world over the areas in need of reform: public and civil freedoms, women’s rights, educational reform, economic liberalization and fighting terrorism. Despite this general consensus, when reform initiatives are designed and introduced by outsiders, extremists and opponents of political and social reform “will conveniently label reform efforts as a mere implementation of a Western agenda against the interests of the Arab world and will probably get away with it.” Muasher went on to say that he supported dialogue between the Arab world and the international community once Arab states have defined their own objectives and chartered their own paths. “If such a dialogue is to be successful, any initiative by the outside world should not be perceived as a movement against Islam. If there is a concern about terrorism, then we share it, and we share a commitment to fight it...This should not turn into a clash of civilizations but into a coalition of civilizations against ignorance and terrorism.”

In noting Jordan’s commitment to making political reform its first priority, Muasher outlined his government’s objectives set out by the Jordanian government, including: freedom of the press and assembly; empowerment of women and ending any legal discrimination against them; development of a more effective political party life and implementing an educational reform plan to encourage independent and critical thinking and bridge the knowledge gap with the rest of the world. The establishment of a human rights center, the implementation of a five year educational reform plan, and the

appointment of seven women to the Senate are among Jordan's accomplishments in accordance with their commitment.

Plenary Address: Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of Sierra Leone
(Appendix K)

Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, president of Sierra Leone, spoke on a number of relevant issues ranging from democracy as it is related to the sociology of conflict, to the need for democratization of the international system. President Kabbah infused personal experiences into his descriptions of Sierra Leone's unique experience with democracy, emphasizing that the country is a multi-religious nation with widespread inter-faith marriage and schooling.

President Kabbah proclaimed that Sierra Leone has a history of strong democratic traditions that are not undermined by religious tensions or Islam. The primary national challenges to realizing democratic reforms stem from the military and sixteen years of conflict. He acknowledged that all societies continuously struggle to develop and sustain democracy with constraints depended upon local traditions. The president advocated the incorporation of these challenges to democratic reform into the wider context of the sociology of conflicts. He warned that overlooking these dimensions would hinder a "correct diagnosis of the problems confronting democracy and social order, which is necessary for the adoption of relevant and effective measures for resolving these problems."

President Kabbah declared that it is not enough for individual countries to practice democratic traditions and urged his peers to endorse democratization of the international system. "Disparities in decision making at the international level do not augur well for the promotion and consolidation of democracy within states." He stated that while democracy is an expensive endeavor for Sierra Leone, he has not allowed financial constraints stand in the way of implementing of local government units. President Kabbah held that bringing democracy to the doors of the people will show them it can address immediate needs to build support for democratic reform. He emphasized that international cooperation among developed and developing nations "in the economic, political and social fields is key to establishment and consolidation of democracy in world today."

Keynote address: Amat Aleem Alsoswa, minister of human rights, Yemen
(Appendix O)

Amat Aleem Alsoswa, the first minister of human rights in Yemen, gave the closing keynote address, declaring that the issues debated at the Congress embody clear priorities for advancing democratic reform. She acknowledged that the differences in opinion expressed by delegates during the plenary and workshop sessions are just as valuable to their understanding of these priorities as their diversity of social, political and cultural experiences. She emphasized that "disagreement is the essence of a democracy that is based on freedom of opinion and the duty to respect the opinions of others."

Minister Alsoswa identified the protection of fundamental rights as the most pressing need in Islamic societies today, advising that democracy has to flow from and be dedicated to respecting these rights. She also addressed the crucial need for economic reform, reduction of poverty, improving systems of public health and the inclusion of women and youth in politics.

Minister Alsoswa concluded by stating that democracy is the only alternative to present day fundamentalism, terrorism and war because it encourages peaceful political and cultural environments.

Plenary Panel: Uniting as Democrats: What We Can Accomplish

Husain Haqqani, visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, moderated the opening discussion that focused on the origins and planning of the Congress and the topics to be discussed during the next two days. The Congress Convening Committee was comprised of Professor Dr. Mehmet Aydin, minister of state of Turkey; Dr. Abdulkarim El-Eryani, secretary general of the General People's Congress Party of Yemen; A. Muhaimin Iskandar, deputy speaker of the People's Representative Council of Indonesia; Abdul Rahman Mohammed Saif Jamsheer, first deputy of the Shura Council of Bahrain; and Dr. Zlatko Lagumdžija, former prime minister of Bosnia.

In their prepared remarks, some panelists expressed impatience with the dubious and false 'dichotomy of incompatibility.' All affirmed that democracy and Islam are in tune with each other and interdependent. "The question [over the compatibility of Islam and Democracy] comes from the West; it is not authentic; the issue has been addressed for the last 25 years; let us not waste anymore time exploring it here," urged Prof Dr. Aydin.

Dr. El-Eryani pointed out that both the momentum for the Congress and the draft platform for Democratic Governance build on past meetings, agreements and declarations. "The significance of this Congress is that it complements and culminates the sum of previous conferences. We meet as equals, as those who have charted the path to democracy and Islamic culture," remarked Dr. El-Eryani.

Dr. Lagumdžija built on this concept of equals and pioneers as he reinforced the need for unity. He explained that establishing a unified network is crucial not only for answering outside attacks and criticism, but also for providing help to each other when it is needed. He noted, "that's how and why I see us all in here: being different and being together."

Plenary Panel: Islamic Culture and the Democratic Tradition

Professor Dr. Mehmet Aydin, minister of state of Turkey, moderated the first plenary panel that focused on practical implementation of democratic values in modern Islamic societies. Co-panelists included Dr. Imam Addaruqtni, member of the Foreign

Affairs and Defense Committee of the People's Representative Council of Indonesia; Princess Basma bint Talal, chair of the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development; Mohand Laenser, minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in Morocco; and Mahamane Ousmane, president of the National Assembly of Niger.

Professor Dr. Aydin began the panel discussion by stating that all regimes have deficiencies in democracy's implementation, and not just predominantly Muslim societies. "What is important and manifest," he stated, "is self-criticism of our own level of achievements." He noted that Turkey, for example, needs to address the lack of women's involvement in political processes, and encourage them to play a greater role in politics at all levels.

Princess Basma bint Talal and Dr. Imam Addaruqutni acknowledged that the ongoing war in Iraq could not be ignored in the context of discussion of culture, religion, free consent and democracy. Both speakers remarked that no one power has a superior method of practicing democracy or has the right to impose their system of governance on others.

Mohand Laenser spoke about the role of community and argued that the relationship between Islamic culture and democratic tradition cannot be defined by individuals. "Democracy is the behavior of an entire community. Islam is not responsible for deviations or using it for ulterior motives. Such actions remain in the sphere of the individual."

Mahamane Ousmane spoke extensively about Niger's successes in implementing democratic reform particularly in increasing the involvement of women and youth and protecting minority rights while still supporting majority rule. "We must make sacrifices in order to give impetus to democracy."

Workshop Sessions

Advances in Democratic Governance: Overcoming past and future challenges

Hafiz Pasha, assistant administrator and regional director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Development Programme, moderated this session on the broad spectrum of concrete achievements in democratic governance throughout the Islamic world. Conducted in Arabic and English, co-panelists included Shaikh Mohammed Aytella Al-Khalifa, minister-president of the Central Informatics Organization of Bahrain and Ibrahim Nasir Mantu, deputy senate president in Nigeria.

Mr. Pasha initiated the workshop by stating that since delegates have overwhelmingly confirmed the lack of contradiction between Islam and democracy, they should focus their discussion on identifying actions, challenges and, in particular, innovations that can be adapted to the democratic needs and requirements of different countries. Mr. Al-Khalifa stated that in Bahrain they recognize that the constitution can

not be just a piece of paper but must be put into practice to win the confidence of the people. The Bahraini constitution was amended in 2002 to include the right to vote for women and in the following parliamentary elections, women voted for the first time. He also noted importance of the people in endorsing and participating in every step of democratization, especially given that it is a deliberate process. Mr. Mantu observed that people will only defend democracy if they benefit from it and mentioned that the implementation of a code of conduct, compulsory education for boys and girls and the establishment of an anticorruption commission are all a part of Nigeria's plan for sustaining democracy.

Mohammed AbdulQader Al-Jassem, editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan* Daily in Kuwait, stated that the dependability and reliability of new democratic structures remains a significant obstacle in many cases of democratization. An Indonesian delegate noted that corruption in her country grew along with democratization and suggested that all people be trained about budgeting and how to monitor government spending as a way to combat this problem.

Implementing Democratic Legal Systems

Luis Ayala, secretary general of Socialist International moderated this workshop with Nimet Cubukcu, a member of the parliament in Turkey. The discussion focused on the challenges delegates faced in implementing democratic legal systems in their respective countries. It also emphasized the need for increased opportunities in order to facilitate the sharing of experiences and the exchanges between democrats governing in predominantly Muslim societies. This workshop was conducted in Turkish and English.

Mr. Cubukcu asserted that democratic change should be in keeping with gradual societal change. He commented that "today, countries seeking to democratize should be very patient. Democracy doesn't come by revolution. Any unnecessary speed in this regard will be counterproductive." Maqo Lakrori, member of parliament and co-founder of the Socialist Party of Albania spoke of the need for all countries, including traditionally modern ones, to implement changes and amendments to the legal systems of governance. "Democratic systems are not fixed," he explained, "they are malleable and must be modified to accommodate societal changes." Mr. Ayala closed the session by emphasizing that there are common challenges facing democrats all over the world and it is important "to carry the visions carried at this Congress and turn them into realities."

Empowering Women and Engaging Youth- new approaches to inclusive politics

Amat Al-Aleem Alsoswa, the minister of human rights in Yemen, moderated this session on incorporating women and youth into political systems throughout the Islamic world. Conducted in Indonesian, Bosnian and English, the panel included Dwi Ria Latifa, a Member of Indonesia's People's Representative Council and Dr. Kadi Sesay, the Minister of Trade, Industry and State Enterprises of Sierra Leone.

Dr. Sesay shared how developments all over the world, since the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development and the Beijing Conference on Women, have pushed progress in the fields of education, health and political participation for women. However, to date, women still comprise 70 percent of the world's poor, and only 13 percent of members of the world's legislators are women. In Asia and Africa, women hold less than 10 percent of parliamentary seats. Dr. Sesay stressed that building the leadership of women should be pushed alongside gender-sensitive approaches in policy making and legislative processes.

Dwi Ria Latifa concurred with Dr. Sesay that gender inequality is brought about by the lack of educational opportunity, and that the inclusion of women and youth is a political rather than a religious issue. She spoke about how the inclusion of women and youth in Indonesian national political life and decision-making has endured numerous challenges similar to other societies in the Islamic world. There have been some successes; notably present day Indonesia is led by a woman president, an event that has helped raise the profile of women in politics. Recent laws relevant to political party lists and implemented for the April 2004 legislative elections encouraged a 30 percent quota for women candidates. Political parties have also grown more concerned about developing better organized women and youth wings in their parties. However, access to better jobs, proper education and health care continue to be key concerns.

Strengthening Relationships between Political Organizations and Civil Society

Emre Kocaoglu, the executive director of the Turkish Democracy Foundation, moderated this discussion, which focused on the value of developing links between political organizations and civil society organizations and how those organizations can be mutually supportive. Conducted in French and English, the panel included Mame Bassine Niang, commissioner for human rights of Senegal, Dr. Kamal Hossain, president of the People's Forum Bangladesh and Minkailu Mansaray, member of the Sierra Leone Parliament.

Minister Niang affirmed that all governing powers need counter-powers, a role which civil society groups fill. In this manner, they play a role in guaranteeing the rule of law. She recommended that both the government and individual civil society groups be very clear in their messages. Mr. Kocaoglu added that civil society groups should have economic and political autonomy, thereby orienting them in opposition to the government. "Anything dependent on political parties or economic elites should not be defined as civil society," he said.

Dr. Kamal Hossain, president of the People's Forum of Bangladesh, emphasized the role that citizens play in empowering civil society. He asserted that "we need to activate citizens; this will be civil society. They begin to realize they don't have to be passive subjects. They have a role beyond just voting." He also suggested that empowering citizens can be accomplished through increased access to the media. Observing the importance of civil society groups, Mr. Mansaray explained that they are intertwined with political party groups. Both have the responsibility to protect minorities

but recognize that the poor are the disempowered majority. He followed these comments with the following assertion: “Civil society groups constitute the raw material from which political parties tap their support.” He cited that in Sierra Leone political parties work to strengthen their relationships with civil society because they act as the catalyst for political change.

Mir Mohammad Rezaul Karim, advisor to the chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, maintained that the need for a good working relationship between civil society and government is obvious. Mr. Karim argued that the real challenge is mastering how to govern democratically between elections. He posited that “the role of civil society is to remind the government that it must fulfill its commitments and promises to the people.”

Mahamadou Issoufou, former prime minister of Niger, chronicled how civil society played the leading role in restoring democracy in his country. He cited that it was the coordination between civil society and new political parties that enabled Niger’s democracy to become a positive means of government.

Participants of the session agreed that the education of girls and women continues to be a problem worldwide, and that laws protecting the rights of girls and women should be closely reviewed and better reinforced. Participants stressed that Islam upholds the values of democracy and tolerance --- and they discussed animatedly how the interpretation of Islam is still used in some countries to impose discrimination on women.

Adding our voice to the international discourse on systems of governance

Kim Campbell, secretary general of the Club of Madrid, moderated this session in which participants discussed common challenges facing their societies and made recommendations to address these challenges. In addition, they conferred on the implementation of future programs and initiatives that would further refute the notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Conducted in Arabic and English, the panelists included Mohamed Elyazghi, minister of country planning, Water & the Environment in Morocco and Dr. Azra Hadžiahmetović, member of parliament in the Council of Europe.

Elyazghi stated that the international worldview towards Islam is one that personifies the religion as “the sick man whose contagious sickness threatens security and stability all over the world.” In response, he noted several promising examples in the Islamic World that positively answer whether it is possible to establish a democratic political system in societies that are not naturally inclined towards democracy.

Dr. Hadžiahmetović offered three recommendations to democrats battling crises of institution and value: 1) analyze the objectives of different regions, ideologies and religions and then assess to what extent these objectives are common; 2) learn about the different objectives and seek common ideas through dialogue; and 3) identify and define the common interests and be ready to change one’s own interests. In addition to Dr. Hadžiahmetović’s recommendations, Ghulam Muhammed Quader, member of

parliament in Bangladesh, spoke of “the need to support poor countries to get their economy in shape and to help them to end poverty.” In poor communities, social justice is absent and there is a strong distrust of democracy. Unfortunately, Muslim fundamentalists are taking advantage of this vacuum.

The role of the international community in supporting citizen-driven reforms

Iqbal Akm Sacranie, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, moderated this session in which participants described the value of international support for democratic reforms and effective mechanisms to implement this support. Conducted in Turkish and English, the panel included Emre Gonensay, former foreign minister of Turkey and Jozefina Topalli, deputy chairwoman of the parliament in Albania.

Mr. Gonensay began by advising that approaches needed to be adapted to the various stages of democratic development of Islamic countries. He asserted that the international community can provide incentives for power holders to change and cited Turkey’s several incentives, such as joining the Council of Europe and NATO. Mr. Gonensay also added that these incentives and any other initiatives from the international community, including economic aid and security guarantees, need to be in partnership and not imposed. When asked what kind of incentives and motivation can be provided for Muslim countries that do not have options like the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Mr. Gonensay suggested a new organization could be created that would attract Islamic countries in particular by providing dialogue and assistance.

Several participants raised the concern that more initiatives need to come from within Islamic countries and that there is too much emphasis by the international community be proactive.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the political advisor to the president of the Awami League of Bangladesh, observed that, because of the perception that political parties have let the people down, nongovernmental organizations receive most of the funding. He said this culture lets political parties off the hook, when they should be pressured to articulate the views of the people.

Overcoming cultural hurdles in implementing democratic governance

Moderated by Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, president of Liberal International, this session focused on outlining effective mechanisms for implementing democratic reforms, with particular emphasis on societies that include factions that are unaccustomed to this form of governance or a diversity of ethnic or cultural traditions with opposing viewpoints. Conducted in Bosnian, Indonesian and English, the panel included Dr. Rexhep Meidani, the former president of Albania and Aminu Bello Masari, speaker of the house of representatives in Nigeria.

Speaker Masari presented how Nigeria has used constitutional reform and other strategies to politically manage a nation, with a population of over 120 million, of diverse ethnic, tribal and religious groupings. Pre-colonial and post-colonial historical developments had led to regional and ethnographic diversities among the population. Subsequently, post-independence leaders brought Nigerians together through various approaches in order to promote mutual understanding among their differences and ultimately allowing for constructive nation-building.

Dr. Meidani discussed cases where a distinct isolated culture exists within the mainstream national culture, such as that of Albania. Dr. Meidani noted that in these instances, the state becomes much more susceptible to heightened political and cultural tensions, as well as the breeding of corruption and a shadow economy. To push for democratic development in Albania, political leaders and civil society needed to look at the roots of these problems before initiating broad changes. Poverty was the first issue addressed, as the split of economic differences among the population was a primary cause of tensions in communities.

Participants from Sierra Leone and Indonesia shared how strategies such as the rotation of local leaders as well as approaches of decentralization have helped address cultural challenges in implementing democratic governance in their countries.

Models of incorporating economic prosperity into democratic reform

Pekin Baran, vice-chairman of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) moderated this session on effective models of merging economic and democratic reforms. Conducted in French and English, the panel included Dr. Zlatko Lagumdžija, former prime minister of the Republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Abdoulaye Elimane Kane, National Secretary and Spokesperson for the Socialist Party of Senegal.

Kane gave a presentation depicting private sector reform and political reform through decentralization. When commenting on Senegal's process for privatization, he stated that requiring parliamentary approval was an indicator of good governance. It ensures that the executive verifies its plan and priorities through the people's representatives. Kane also affirmed that decentralization helped promote participation and ensure that local government priorities were not imposed on the people from a central power.

Dr. Lagumdžija took a different approach to the session's topic and discussed Bosnia-Herzegovina's struggle to carry out its plans to reconstruct the country, promote economic recovery and focus on medium and small enterprise. With what was supposed to be a four-year plan approaching its tenth year, he stated that pace is important as a government is judged on its economic performance. To this end, Dr. Lagumdžija asserted that democratic reform cannot take place without free market mechanisms to bring about economic prosperity. He maintained that political and institutional stability will only occur if people have confidence that the economy will improve.

Press Conference and Presentation of the Platform for Democratic Governance

Immediately following the Congress, delegates Abdul Rahman Mohammed Saif Jamsheer, Dwi Ria Latifa, Dr. Abdulkarim El-Eryani, Dr. Zlatko Lagumdžija, Mahamane Ousmane and Emre Kocaoglu, president of the Turkish Democracy Foundation presented the *Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World*. This culminating event introduced journalists and interested parties to the Platform and the final remarks on the Congress proceedings. Delegates took questions from over 50 assembled journalists from Turkish and international media outlets. (see Appendix Q: Press release issued on April 14, 2004)

IV. FOLLOW-UP AND FUTURE PROGRAMS

In their final working group sessions on April 14, delegates discussed their suggestions for follow-up activities. There was strong interest in making sure that the Congress of Democrats would not be a one-time event, but rather an ongoing forum. Following is a summary of several of the most prominent recommendations from delegates:

- **Establish a website** that serves as a resource for both delegates and other Muslim democrats seeking to join the community that convened in Istanbul. It should incorporate the Platform as a centerpiece and include news events, training materials and opportunities for democratic political leaders to share their experiences and solicit advice and support from others who have faced similar challenges in other countries.
- **Reconvene for future gatherings** so the historic discussion that began in Istanbul may be continued. Such gatherings may happen on a global, regional or national scale. Participants at future gatherings should include more young leaders.
- **Form a network of democratic political parties** from the Islamic world, similar in function to the Christian Democrats and the Socialist International. This so-called Muslim Democrats International could be a unifying organization that would facilitate idea exchanges between like-minded parties. It would not compete with or detract from the other political party internationals, but would provide a subset of the other groupings' membership with additional assistance tailored to their needs.

Already the majority of delegates have made progress on follow-up activities in their own countries. Meetings of delegates, political party leaders and interested civic groups have been held in several countries. For example, the Indonesian delegates recently hosted a group of Afghani political leaders to promote the Platform and their involvement in the network, and are planning a similar meeting with leading Iraqi's in September. Press conferences were held in eight countries to announce the results of the

Congress and release the Platform. And the Platform itself has become a point of discussion in several legislatures and in the political campaigns of politicians in several countries.

V. MEDIA COVERAGE

International and local media coverage of the first Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World reached print, television and radio audiences on every continent. The combination of global media networks, including the BBC, CNN, the Associated Press and Reuters, with individual outlets covering certain countries or regions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, ANSA and Al-Jazeera, delivered extensive international coverage for the Congress and many delegates.

Media outreach was aimed at highlighting delegates and their viewpoints, promoting key Congress spokespeople, and attracting journalists to attend keynote speeches and the closing press conference. Approximately 56 one-on-one interviews were arranged between delegates and international and Turkish media. Five Turkish channels carried live broadcasts of the opening plenary session, and a total of 49 live and taped television segments aired in Turkey. Delegates took part in 36 one-on-one interviews. More than 50 news articles on the Congress appeared in approximately 13 newspapers and news magazines. In addition, valuable contacts were made between the media and delegates that have led to more coverage of Muslim democrats and the issue of democratic reform in predominately Muslim countries. (Copies of articles from International and Turkish Press can be found in Appendix R)

VI. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective 1: Gather democratic leaders from predominantly Muslim countries to share experiences and draw attention to their democratic accomplishments.

Indicators of Success

- The Congress succeeded in bringing together over 70 Muslim Democrats from 14 predominantly Muslim countries from around the world.
- During the two-day Congress, delegates actively shared best practices specific to their experiences and identified common trends in governance and reform in predominantly Muslim democracies.

Objective 2: Make a bold statement to politicians and journalists that Islam and Democracy are compatible

Indicators of Success

- International media coverage of the first Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World reached print, television and radio audiences on every continent.

Objective 3: Develop and disseminate a platform that describes democratic reforms that have already taken place in the Islamic World and guides continuing reform

Indicators of Success

- In advance of the April meeting, participants reviewed and commented on the draft platform
- During the Congress, participants discussed additional recommendations to be added to the Platform and discussed implementation of the principles listed in the statement. Ultimately, the final platform incorporated these contributions, moving it from a static document to a Platform.
- Before the close of the Congress, participants adopted the *Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World*. In adopting the Plan, participants agreed to become a party to the document, thereby confirming their commitment to the dissemination of the *Platform for Democratic Governance in the Islamic World* within their parties, networks and countries.

VII. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

In comments made during and after the program, the delegates to the Congress considered the event to be a tremendous success. They were pleased to take part in such a unique opportunity where politicians could gather and speak freely of their successes and challenges, gaining valuable insight from colleagues facing similar cultural and political hurdles around the world.

Donors to the Congress, in an informal meeting following the proceedings, described the event as one of the more important gatherings of its kind and a critical step forward in the continued democratic reform efforts of political leaders in the Islamic world. Several donors used the Congress as an opportunity to identify new, more effective opportunities to focus funding, and for some this was an opportunity to join with other donors and coordinate future programs.

The media attention paid to the Congress was very wide. Coverage reached every continent. The positive message of the Congress was prevalent throughout the stories and, while it didn't carry in every single article, it was the dominant theme of the vast majority. Skeptical news outlets such as Al Jazeera wrote optimistic stories, and few media outlets had criticisms of the contributors to the program.

The careful manner in which the Platform was drafted, debated, and distributed – based on the consensus of the delegates – was a critical factor in its lasting importance. At the time of its initial release it received significant attention by legislators and political leaders in and out of the Islamic world. Its further translation and distribution following the Congress allowed for the Platform to play an important political role in several of the

countries where delegates were from. The Platform was discussed in political campaigns, legislative sessions, political party meetings and amongst civic organizations. References were made to the Platform throughout the Organization of Islamic Conference held in June in Istanbul and it has become a point of reference in statements and declarations emerging from other conferences and meetings in the region.

The Congress and resulting Platform contributed significantly to a political climate where leading writers and politicians are no longer questioning the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The democratic accomplishments highlighted during this program have been widely viewed as positive proof that many predominantly Muslim countries do have democratic attributes and, while challenges still remain, political leaders in these countries are steadily making progress in democratic reform.

As the Congress organizers begin plans for follow-up to the program, it is clear that continued efforts must be made to ensure a broad base of financial and political support. Like the Congress, proposal for follow-up must come from the delegates and they donors and organizers should follow their lead in determining a direction for the program. While many donors and delegates are anxious to implement follow-up activities without any delay, we feel that a steady pace of activity will help to ensure long-term support for the program and may be more politically sustainable.

VIII. APPENDICES

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- B. Platform for the Democratic Governance of the Islamic World
- C. Delegate and Participant Biographies
- D. List of Donors and Sponsors
- E. Remarks by Madeleine Albright
- F. Remarks by Hafiz Pasha
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- J. Remarks by Shaikh Mohammed Ateyatalla Al-Khalifa
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- L. Remarks by Mohamed Elyazghi
- M. Remarks by Dr. Azra Hadžiahmetović
- N. Remarks by Nada Abbas Haffad
- O. Remarks by Amat AlAlim AlSoswa
- P. Press release April 13, 200
- Q. Press release April 14, 2004
- R. Press Clippings
- S. Delegate and Participant Contact Information