

**Statement by Dr. Hafiz Pasha at the Welcome Reception  
of the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World**

Istanbul, Turkey

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Dr. Kadir Topbas, Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality,  
Mr. Emre Kocaoglu, Executive Director, Turkish Democracy Foundation,  
Secretary Madeleine Albright, Chairperson, National Democratic Institute,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely pleased that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one of the co-sponsors, along with the Turkish Democracy Foundation and the National Democratic Institute, of this unique and special event, the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World. The extraordinary interest of the international community in this event is indicated by the fact that besides the co-sponsors there are also a large number of partners who are supporting this Congress.

I would like first to thank Mayor Topbas for hosting this Congress in the great and historical city of Istanbul, which is at the junction of different civilizations. Given the important steps that your country has taken towards a modern functional democracy, Istanbul is a fitting venue for our meeting.

The two objectives of the Congress are indeed worthwhile and highly relevant in the current global context. These are, first, to provide a forum for a distinguished group of democratic political leaders from Muslim countries to discuss challenges and share success stories and strategies for maintaining and promoting democracy in the Islamic world; and, second, to enable political leaders to make clear statements about their commitments to democratic governance, specifically through the formation and declaration of a democratic platform for the Islamic world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no doubt that democratic values are entirely compatible with the principles of an Islamic State, as contained in the injunctions of the Holy Koran, of tolerance, justice, participation, accountability and social justice.

The universal commitment to democracy is evidenced by the signing of the Millennium Declaration by almost 190 heads of state or government, including those from Muslim member states, at the historic Millennium Summit of the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000. The Millennium Declaration says and I quote,

“We will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Today, almost 70% of Islamic countries are signatories to the international conventions relating to civic and political rights and to the freedom of association and collective bargaining. Adherence to these conventions will require the building of democratic societies. Major strides have been made towards democracy during the decades of the 80s and 90s by a number of Muslim countries, especially in South and South East Asia, and Central, West and Northern Africa. It is estimated that currently almost 760 million Muslims, or over 50% of the global population of 1.5 billion Muslims, live in countries with democratic systems. The

popularity of democracy among Muslims is demonstrated by the World Values Survey for 1995 to 2001, which shows that as much as 87% of Muslim respondents favour democracy as a form of government.

We must recognise, however, that the process of spreading democracy in the Islamic world needs to be grounded on the following. First, it must arise from an indigenous movement and imperatives and not be imported from outside. Second, it must be consistent with the history, traditions and culture of a particular country. Third, it must ideally be a peaceful transition based on the realisation that democracy fulfills best the aspirations of the people. Only when these conditions are met is democracy likely to become permanently embodied in the political system of a country and confer the maximum benefits. Otherwise, it will remain an alien and dysfunctional form of government with the risk of reversals, as we have seen in some countries. For evolving a strong and growing commitment to democracy, emphasis will have to be placed on educating the general population and on removing social and economic inequities which lead to the capture of the state by vested interests.

The general experience is that a vibrant and functioning democracy best promotes human development and greater social justice, including the reduction of poverty. As highlighted in the UNDP Global Human Development Report of 2002 on “Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World,” politics is as important as economics to successful development. Sustained poverty reduction requires equitable growth, but it also requires that poor people have political power. And the best way to achieve that in a manner consistent with human development objectives is to build strong and deep forms of democratic governance at all levels of society. The recent Arab Human Development Reports have outlined the most important development challenges facing the Arab world as removing the three deficits in democratic governance, knowledge and women’s empowerment respectively.

The international community must stand ready to support countries in their journey towards democratic development. That is why across the globe and throughout the Islamic world, UNDP is playing a leading role in supporting indigenous efforts to build democratic governance. Programs in this area now account for more than half of total expenditures of UNDP on technical assistance and capacity building, aggregating to grant assistance of almost one billion dollars per year for democratic governance. This assistance is provided in six areas—decentralization and local governance, strengthening of parliaments and electoral processes, justice and human rights, public administration reform and anti-corruption, and e-governance. As examples, UNDP is engaged in parliamentary strengthening in Senegal and Lebanon; support to the recent Indonesian elections; work on anti-corruption in Bangladesh and Nigeria; and human rights in Jordan and Morocco.

Respected delegates, you are gathered here because each of you has courageously struggled to open for your countries a democratic path for the future. During the course of this forum, you will share experiences of implementing democratic reforms and you will craft a platform that can serve as a standard for others to follow. In so doing, you will give hope to all of us who believe that the UN Millennium Development Goals can only be realised through a community of united and truly democratic nations supporting each other.

Thank you.