



**PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC**

General Secretariat  
Secretariat for Political Coordination and Institutional Affairs  
**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM – UNDP**  
With support from the **EUROPEAN UNION**

## **CONCEPT PAPER**

### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DEMOCRACY: CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION AND FEDERALISM**

#### **Introduction and Background**

In 2004, the UNDP released the Report “Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens’ Democracy” as part of a strategy designed to promote democratic governance and human development in the region.

A group of international experts elaborated a document – as a result of extensive field surveys and studies in eighteen countries, an opinion poll involving 18,643 people, 231 interviews (with political, economic, and intellectual leaderships in the continent), several workshops and analyses of a set of articles produced by members of the academic and political communities.

The Report is part of the Project on Democratic Development in Latin America (PRODDAL), developed by the UNDP with support from the European Union. The purpose of the Report is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the status of democracy in the continent; to introduce new approaches to address problems that jeopardize the region’s potential for development; and to support political and democratic dialogue in Latin American societies.

The Report aims at fostering debates at national and international levels on the dilemmas faced by Latin America’s fledgling democracies. It sheds light on the multiple facets of democracies in the region and provides comparable inputs derived from the reality of each country. In addition,

the Report includes a statistical compendium that allows one to make multiple comparisons among the various countries in the continent. The Report is an input for political, public policy making and academic communities. It is based on a sound conceptual framework that is underpinned by the assumption that citizenship is democracy's *leitmotiv*.

The message conveyed by the Report stretches beyond the analysis of representative democracy and social democracy in Latin America. It is a call for political action. It brings politics to the foreground of the debate on democracy. It places the State in the foreground of the discussion on democracy according to an approach based on citizens' rights. It stresses how important it is to qualify dilemmas in the economic domain instead of thoughtlessly approving macroeconomic policies based on the assumption that no alternative is possible. Also, the Report discusses opportunities and threats brought about by globalization.

The body of information provided by the Report represents an intellectual asset meant to support political debates, development and implementation of public policies, applied research, comparative analyses and, in particular, political activity. The analyses have been developed according to concepts that reflect a broader view of what democracy is all about. The underlying conceptual framework takes into account three levels of citizenship – political, civil and social levels – and maintains that all three levels need to be balanced and continually expanded. This approach is based on a conception of democracy that is grounded in a combination of citizens' rights and the UNDP's set of goals, which places an emphasis in the importance of freedom for the sake of development.

New political indicators related to electoral democracy and support to democracy were also introduced into the debate. The Electoral Democracy Index is intended to provide a parameter for the assessment and comparison of formal aspects of a country's representative democracy. This indicator is comprised of four elements: voting right, ability to hold free elections, transparency of electoral processes, and the proportion of elected individuals who hold positions of a political nature. The Democracy Support Index categorizes social groups according to three basic positions regarding the democratic regime: in favor, against, and ambivalent. Divisions were made according to variables such as social class, region, and socioeconomic profile.

Many of the findings of the Report are reasonably known. Once they have been sorted and scrutinized in the context of a sound analytical base, however, the results become eloquent.

Representative democracy has not been able to provide economic and social benefits to Latin American citizens. Political democracy coexists with extremely high inequality levels, a phenomenon that lingers on in the continent, two decades after most countries have undergone a new democratization process. Formal democratic procedures have not been able to ensure full citizenship at political, civil and social levels.

The contents of political activity have been eroding, despite the set of requirements in a formal democracy being met. Exacerbated pragmatism has been distorting political debate and voiding truly meaningful political choices. Therefore it is no wonder that the leaders who were interviewed under the Report mention large business conglomerates (79.7%) and media groups (65.2%) as the ones who actually control power in the continent. If power does not lie with the top levels of the three democratically established branches of power, so there is something wrong with the institutional arrangements governing Latin American democracies.

Some data contained in the Report are particularly thought provoking. 43.9% of Latin American citizens are skeptical about democracy being able to solve their basic social and economic problems. 54.7% of them are willing to consider authoritarian solutions if these can address economic problems in their countries. In this sense, over half of Latin Americans interviewed would admit the possibility of living under authoritarian rule provided their quality of life improves. The rationale behind this statement is fragile and ambiguous. Ambivalence plays an important role regarding preferences of key groups as far as political regimes are concerned. The inclination towards resorting to authoritarian solutions is significant, even if not prevailing.

The Report also puts forward some intriguing issues. For example, Latin American leaders consider political and party systems to be the primary causes of democracy's poor performance, (45 and 32 leaders mentioned them respectively, out of 231 interviewees). These leaders assign little importance to social policies as a requirement for strengthening democracy (only 8 mentioned it). Nevertheless, according to the citizens interviewed, employment generation (34.6%) and poverty alleviation (26.3%) appear as critical problems for citizens' democracy. The disconnection of priorities is remarkable. While leaders give priority to aspects of representative democracy, individuals are concerned with elements of citizen's democracy. A worrisome potential inference is that social exclusion is indeed consistent with representative democracy.

Overall, the Report proposes an agenda of reforms to strengthen democracy by indicating four main topics for debate: restoration of the contents and relevance of politics and institutions,

promotion of a new “estatalidad”, economy through the perspective of democracy and increased autonomy of the State within globalization. This agenda reflects a need to focus the debate on politics, assuming that development of democracy is closely related to pursuit of increased social equity, to struggle against poverty and to enlargement of citizens’ rights.

### **The International Conference**

The international event organized by the Brazilian Government and the UNDP, with support from the European Union, builds on the previous analyses and discussions about the Report. It is perceived as a contribution to subsequent strengthening of the debate on democracy in Latin America.

Politics is suffering a serious crisis as a result of its meaning as a social choice process growing weaker. When politics becomes a mere fight for power, it gets divorced from individuals’ preferences and consequently from social choices. Only improved politics can help strengthen democracy and tackle inequalities. Politics is essentially a process whereby collective choices are made, but this is not sufficient. Strengthening democracy calls for ongoing development of democratic institutions, such as an independent media, an autonomous judiciary branch, creation of mechanisms to uphold human rights and implementation of networks to protect the poor. In short, strengthening democracy requires political, civil and social citizenship to be ensured.

The event to take place in Brazil taps into some aspects of the Report that stand at crossroads of the agenda of the Latin American continent. It is not the intention of the event to exhaust the Report’s contributions, which would be impossible. It simply seeks to direct the debate to some important, complimentary issues. The event will address four aspects of the debate on democracy in the continent: development and integration, social participation, federalism and an agenda to tackle inequality and strengthen democracy.

The purpose of the first panel – National Development, Regional Integration and Democracy – is to provide an opportunity for a debate on the issue of the State’s autonomy in the context of democratic regimes and in an increasingly globalized world. This is an issue with which all Latin American countries are faced. Although globalization and increasing interdependence among countries provide vast opportunities and an environment favorable to successful concerted policies, they also restrict and constrain both decision-making processes and the range of

alternatives available. Latin American countries have before them national level choices and regional level challenges posed by globalization. Decisions have been made by nations, but the new world order has been persistently countering them. Future developments will depend on present choices. A policy to revamp regional level efforts is imperative and paramount. The timing of such decisions is critical to define the direction countries in the continent will follow. The panel will be coordinated by the Presidency of the Republic's Secretary for Political Coordination and Institutional Affairs.

The second panel – Democracy and Social Participation – exploits the potential for strengthening democracy through the introduction of participatory mechanisms designed to increase accountability and the government's ability to respond to citizens. A breakdown of the generic concept of citizenship carried out in the Report illustrates how complex citizens' democracy is and places the debate on a different level. The main argument is that although important achievements have been made from the perspective of political democracy in Latin America, it remains unfinished because civil and social citizenships are fragile. Brazil has been leading the introduction of participatory social innovations as democratic resources. Participatory budgets, municipal councils, and transparent planning are some of the national innovations in this area. The discussion encompasses the local, sub-national, national, and supranational levels of government. The panel's findings will serve as special inputs to the discussion on potential strengthening of democracy through expansion of civil citizenship and social citizenship. The Secretary-General of the Presidency – whose mandate explicitly aims at promoting and enhancing dialogues between the State and the Civil Society – will be the moderator of this panel.

The third panel – Democracy and Federalism – will focus on discussions about sub-regional asymmetries and federative issues. The sub-national levels of government have been increasingly added to the debate on democracy in Latin America. Countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia, and Colombia have been compelled to debate the issue of regional heterogeneity so as to ensure their governability. A broad-based debate is ongoing on the dilemmas of decentralization processes, on intergovernmental relationships and on how power and funds are allocated to the various government levels. Decentralization processes are not neutral, and they can either benefit or not socially marginalized groups. The panel is supposed to clarify risks and opportunities involved in the evolution of the topic on decentralization and

the contribution to the national agenda. Minister of Education Tarso Genro – former mayor of Porto Alegre, one of the cities hosting the World Social Forum– will facilitate the panel.

The objective of the fourth panel – an agenda for democracy and alleviation of social inequalities – is to provide inputs to address one of the most challenging issues in the continent. Latin America is the most unequal region in the world, even after two decades of democracy. The Report raises a disturbing issue: what is the purpose of a democratic state if it cannot alleviate poverty and inequalities? The State must be rebuilt and regenerated so that it can face up to the challenges in the continent. If Latin American democracies are not able to overcome social exclusion and inequity levels and to promote economic growth and human development, inconsistencies in the regime will be exacerbated. The panel intends to help elucidate challenges, dilemmas, and paths that must be addressed in a consistent and sustainable fashion so that effective success in policies designed for poor populations and consolidation of democratic regimes can be obtained. The Minister of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation will be the moderator for this panel.

How it will work

The Brazilian Government and the UNDP have invited distinguished individuals from the various Latin American countries. Leaders and representatives from national and sub-national governments, from the civil society, and from the academic world will take part in the panels and debates. Each panel will be moderated by a Minister of State and will have three speakers. Conceptual inputs will be provided during each debate and will guide the discussions in each panel. The first round of discussions will take place among guest participants. The second round of discussions will be open to all other participants.

The event will be filmed and recorded, but not with business purposes. The main sections of the debates will be edited and posted at the government's and UNDP's websites. Videocassettes will subsequently be provided to partners and organizations interested in having records of the discussions and debates. The contents of the debates will also be transcribed and edited to be added in a publication based on this event.

All information related to logistics of the event will be posted in the event's website one month prior to the event, from November 1st. Potential participants will find in this source all the data, texts, and studies related to the Conference, and will be able to download all texts related to the

event. The event's website will be online for two months after the event and will also be accessible through the Presidency and the UNDP.

During the event, versions in Portuguese of the Report and its Executive Summary will also be released ("Ideas and Contributions"). In view of the importance of the event and the related discussions, the UNDP will subsequently publish a book containing the texts of presentations, including the related debates.