

SPEECH BY
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA
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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

The Honorable Kim Campbell,

Mr. Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy,

Delegates to the World Assembly of World Movement for Democracy,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, on behalf of the Government and people of Indonesia, I am pleased to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to Jakarta, Indonesia.

This is a very impressive gathering of the members of the World Movement for Democracy, who have come from all around the world. I commend you in your tireless dedication in the cause of promoting democracy.

We meet at a challenging time.

On the one hand, we saw a positive trend of significant expansion of democracies, particularly in the second half of the 20th century. Democracies, through different means, expanded in many regions – in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America. That democratic wave also swept Indonesia in 1997, and changed us for good.

As a result, the political map of the world was significantly changed, with all its strategic, geopolitical, economic and social consequences. In Asia, there was a time several decades ago when Japan was the only democracy in the region. But today, Asia is home to many democracies.

But at the same time, we are also seeing a parallel trend of democracies in distress. Military c'oup. Political instability. Constitutional crisis. Divisive polarization. Violent conflicts. The return to authoritarianism. Failed states.

I do believe that, in most cases, this is temporary. Democracy, as we all know too well in Indonesia from experience, is never easy, never smooth, and

never linear. It always involves a painful process of trial and error, with many ups and downs.

So do not despair.

I am convinced that ultimately the 21st century instinct is the democratic instinct. And the democratic instinct in the 21th century is inevitably stronger than the democratic instinct in the 20th century.

This is because the world will be more – not less - swept by the powerful force of globalization. Globalization is bringing greater connectivity – of people, goods, services, information, ideas. Nations, communities, families and individuals will be mutually “exposed”. Prosperity will spread, and the self-esteem that go with it. The middle-class everywhere will grow – it is said that for the first time in history, more than half of world population is now loosely categorized as middle-class.

In that process, as they grow in strength and confidence, sooner or later they are bound to seek greater transparency and accountability in the decisions that affect their lives. No political system can ignore this. Their choice is to adapt and survive, or to resist and crumble.

Irregardless of how one defines that elusive term “democracy”, and no matter what political model you embrace, I have no doubt that, in our time, the future belongs to those who are willing to RESPONSIBLY embrace pluralism, openness, and freedom.

I say this based on the Indonesian experience.

For decades, when we experienced high economic growth in the 1970's and 1980's, Indonesians found convenient cover in our “comfort zone”, an authoritarian system that sought stability, development and national unity at all costs.

We believed then that Indonesians were not ready for democracy - that democracy was not suitable for Indonesia's cultural and historical conditions. It was widely held that democracy would lead to national regress, rather than progress. Thus, our political development had to proceed through a very narrow and rigid corridor. Certainty was much more preferred than uncertainty.

What many of us find surprising is how fast Indonesians ditched that notion, and how swift we transformed our mindset. Yes, it took some noisy soul searching and fierce public debate about the form and pace of democratic change. But 10 years after we held our first “reformasi” free elections in 1999, democracy in Indonesia is irreversible and a daily fact of life. Our people not only freely but enthusiastically accept democracy as a given, as their right. And in that process, they increasingly feel ownership of the political system.

This proved that at some level, there was a deep-seated democratic impulse that are found among many Indonesians that was waiting to be drawn out. It also proved that once individuals and communities tasted the air of democracy and choice, they are most likely to cling to it and fight for it when it is under threat.

In short, we have awakened our democratic instinct.

Indonesia's democratic experience is also relevant in another way. For many decades, we lived in an intellectual and political environment which argued that we had to choose between democracy and economic growth. "You could not have both. Its one or the other", they said. And for many years, for our own good, we believed that – and chose economic growth over democracy.

I do not wish to prejudge my predecessor. But I can tell you that such is no longer the case of today's Indonesia. Today, our democracy is growing strong, while at the same time, Indonesia is registering the third highest economic growth among G-20 countries, after China and India. In other words, we do not have to choose between democracy and development – we CAN achieve both ! And we can achieve both at the same time !

Indonesia's democratic experience is also relevant if you consider the doomsday scenario about it. When we embarked on the path of democracy in the early years, there were voices, internally and also internationally, who said we would fail.

And why not ?

Indonesia was in total disarray. Our economy contracted by 12 %. Ethnic violence flared up. East Timor seceded from Indonesia. Terrorist bombs were exploding. Constitutional crisis seemed endless. Between 1998 and 2001, we had 4 Presidents : President Suharto, President Habibie, President Abdurrachman Wahid and President Megawati Soekarnoputri.

Even Thomas Friedman called Indonesia, like Russia, "the messy state – too large to work, too important to fail". Many predicted Indonesia, after East Timor's secession, would break apart into pieces. Some even talked about us becoming a failed state.

But we proved the skeptics wrong. Indonesia's democracy has grown from strength to strength. We held 3 peaceful periodic national elections, in 1999, in 2004, and in 2009. We peacefully resolved the conflict in Aceh, with a democratic spirit, and pursued political and economic reforms in Papua. We made human rights protection a national priority. We pushed forward ambitious decentralization. Rather than regressing, Indonesia is progressing.

There is a larger revelation at work here : no matter how bad the political, economic and social conditions, no matter how deep you fall to unimagined depths, democracies CAN pull through. There IS a way up. There is always hope. And you should never let go of it.

What is important to keep in mind is that Indonesia's democratic development could have easily gone the other way – on a downward spiral, crashing. I personally believe there is a "hidden hand" at work here, guiding us to make the right turns at critical crossroads in history.

But I also know that it takes more than luck. Making democracy work requires faith, discipline, determination and creative improvisation.

One of the key lessons for us is that democracy must connect with good governance.

In the early years of our transition, this was one of the hardest things to do. We were so consumed in the euphoria of our newfound freedom that there was a time that governance suffered. In some places, mismanagement and corruption became worse under elected leaders. Quickly, we realized that democracy is not a panacea. Elections alone will not automatically solve the age-old problems of poverty, corruption, separatism and unemployment. And leaders who basked for too long in populist rhetoric without producing results will end up hurting the people who elected them.

In our case, it is only once democracy was combined with good governance – with corresponding strategy, policy, decisions and capacity – that we were able to strengthen national unity, resolve conflicts, enhance economic growth, and promote social cohesion.

This is why I believe it is important for this Conference to discuss how democracies can better deliver results for the people. How do we produce better leaders ? How do we ensure that more democracy means less corruption ? How do we make sure that democracy leads to responsible and responsive Government ?

The appeal of democracy should not just rest on the power of choice, but also on the promise that it will bring better opportunities to citizens. And we do this, always keep in our mind that good governance is neither a natural part nor the monopoly of democracies. Non-democracies and semi-democracies can also develop good governance. Every – and I mean every - political system must EARN that precious reputation of governance and not take it for granted.

I can tell you that one of the key challenges for our democratic development is how to minimize and ultimately do away with “money politics”. This, I know, is a problem even for many established democracies – western and non western alike. We also know that money always follow politics – in a variety of ways. But money politics can seriously undermine democracy because it induces elected leaders and politicians to serve their pay masters at the expense of the public good. It also produces artificial democracy, one that betrays public trust and crushes the democratic ideals and conscience.

I believe that the more money politics prevail, the less the people’s aspirations will be heard, and the more democracy will suffer. Certainly, fighting money politics will be a short, medium and long term challenge for Indonesia’s democracy.

One of the reasons our democracy has worked derived from a hard lesson from our past : build a future that focuses on institutions and rules, not personalities.

History, of course, is full of great men and women. But political systems that gravitate around the force of individual personalities will find it increasingly hard to sustain itself. As we experienced in Indonesia twice, when the strong Leader fell from power, the entire system crumbled with him because the

system was simply a mirror image of the Leader. Indeed, I define strong leaders are those who develop a durable system.

This is why in our democratic development it is extremely critical to build lasting institutions. In the past 10 years, this is precisely what we have done. Our periodic elections ensure political accountability and peaceful changeovers. The office of the President is no longer the all-powerful dominant executive that it once was. The military and police no longer intervenes in politics. There is a system of checks and balances. The Parliament is vibrant and completely independent, and so is the judiciary. The constitutional relations among them are clearly defined. And the rule of law reigns supreme in our land.

All this is important because leaders may come and go, but the system must remain, and democracy must go on. Indeed, when I end my second Presidential term in 2014, *insya Allah*. I expect the affairs of the state to continue as usual. And THAT is democracy in progress.

But one of the reasons our democracy has held up is that it is completely homegrown. Democracy cannot be imposed from the outside. Democracies that are not sourced from within, or that cannot generate that homegrown energy, will run out of steam and experience political decay.

Yes, our democracy came out of a political crisis that was triggered by the financial crisis in 1997, which originated from outside our borders. But the desire to get rid of corruption, collusion and nepotism came wholly from within. The aspiration for political change and “reformasi” came from within. The determination to rebuild Indonesia anew came from within. These things were not imposed by outsiders but were the genuine will of the Indonesian people.

Of course, we have been open and learned a lot from our friends from around the world, but ultimately we are OUR OWN stakeholders in our democratic experiment. If we rise or fall, it is because of our own doing or undoing.

It is telling that last year a survey found that some 85 % of Indonesians believed that the country was heading in the right direction. They may not agree with the leader or opposition, they may be critical of government policies as they should always be, but they believe in their heart that the system was working, and was optimistic about it.

To a new democracy like Indonesia, this is very encouraging. This is a sign that democracy is maturing.

It also means that you can never go wrong if you trust the people. If the 3 Indonesian elections in the past 10 years have taught us anything, it is that the voters are much smarter than most politicians give them credit for. Politicians may wage dirty campaign, confuse the public with deceptions, spark messages of hatred, seduce them to return to the past, or promise the world for them.

But ultimately the voters will make up their own mind, and in the voting booth they will responsibly, carefully and rationally cast their vote. What is

incredible is that this is generally happening irregardless of educational or economic status of the voters.

Thus, if we in Indonesia have made the right turns in history, it is only because that power of judgment rests at the hands of the good people who exercise it with great caution.

It is the people who in the last 3 elections have consistently turned out in large numbers to vote. Even though voting is not compulsory, and even though we have a complex system that requires voters to return to the voting booth a few times within months, voting turn out in Indonesia has been consistently very high. These voters know there is a direct and absolute connection between the ballot in their possession and the future of their country.

That is why the most terrible thing to waste in a democracy is the mandate from the people, and the most precious asset to keep is the public trust. Believe me - once you lose that trust, you will not regain it.

Indeed, I see democratic development as a constant process of expanding opportunities and empowerment of the people. It is a process to promote gender equality and bring more women into politics. It is a process to reach out to those that are still marginalized. It is a process to prevent a tyranny of the majority, and build a national consensus on the future direction of a country. It is a democracy where every citizen can become a stake-holder.

For a mosaic country like Indonesia, that means not just promoting multi-party democracy but also building a multi-ethnic democracy, and a democracy that guarantees freedom of religion for all.

We in Indonesia have shown, by example, that Islam, democracy, and modernity can grow together. We are a living example that there is no conflict between a muslim's spiritual obligation to Allah SWT, his civic responsibility as a citizen in a pluralist society, and his capacity to succeed in the modern world. It is also telling that in our country, Islamic political parties are among the strongest supporters of democracy – and they have every reason to be.

This brand of moderation, openness and tolerance in Indonesia and in other societies around the world is the seed of a 21st century world order marked by harmony among civilizations.

It is a sad fact that humanity has never had the good fortune to enjoy a Century without conflict or contest between civilizations and cultures. But the 21st Century can be different. It need not – it must not – be a century of clash of civilizations. It can be a Century marked by the emergence of a global conscience across cultures and civilizations, working together to advance common cause of peace and progress. That is why I appreciate the theme of your conference : “Solidarity across cultures”.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is time for us to build on this solidarity across cultures to promote a confluence of civilizations, and make the 21st century the best century in the history of humankind.

I thank you.