
**JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONFERENCE:
FUNCTIONING & MANAGEMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN ESARP**

***13 & 14 March 2008
Mount Soche Hotel
Blantyre - Malawi***

1. At the invitation of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy Malawi in partnership with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, some 50 delegates representing more than 42 political parties hailing from six African states, met in Blantyre, Malawi, from 13-14th March 2008. Delegates represented both ruling parties and opposition parties in all of these countries and came from Kenya; Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. Also in attendance were representatives of civil society organisations.
2. The Keynote address was delivered by the head of the Malawi Electoral Commission, Justice Anastazia Msosa, who observed that democracy makes any country better off than one that is an autocracy. She pointed out that alongside a vibrant civil society and independent media, judiciary and legislature, political parties were, in contemporary society, one of the most instrumental institutions for a democracy to function. Yet parties have been given very little attention for such a long time; this needed to be addressed. Importantly, she concluded that the political parties at the conference needed to address the general distrust that the public has in them.
3. The uniqueness of this conference lay in the fact that it was devoted largely to introspection by political parties of their own internal processes and practices, judging these against the precepts of democracy. Other issues discussed which impact directly upon parties' abilities to function as democratic institutions were: *Floor Crossing* and *Party Financing*. Lastly, the conference dissected the post 2007 general elections crisis in Kenya and its causes, and briefly examined the prospects for a peaceful and open election in the forthcoming 2008 General Election in Zimbabwe.
4. The conference agreed with the research which pointed to major discrepancies in the internal democratic functioning of parties. It resolved that it was not good enough for political parties merely to advocate for democracy in the country but that they need to lead by example in ensuring that their intra-party machineries and processes function democratically in a manner that ensures inclusiveness and the space for open debate and discussion aimed at influencing party policy. This includes holding regular elections of party officials, routine internal consultations, provision for vulnerable groups such as women and youth and transparency of all processes. Parties should become more responsive to the needs and choices of their membership. Democratic processes for filling leadership and other positions should be developed and adhered to. Access to independent public resources influences the ability of parties to develop democratic internal practices and procedures. In the absence of this, there is a great danger that those bankrolling the party might be able to control it as personal property.

5. On the models of funding for political parties the salient issues upon which the conference found agreement were:
 - That access to finance affects the outcome of elections. Accordingly, that public financing of political parties is important as it enhances the level playing field and the outcome of elections and thus the vibrancy and welfare of democracy;
 - The financing of parties from the public purse will minimise the perpetuation of the tradition of the patronising, perpetual founder syndrome;
 - That where public and private financing of parties is provided for, parties should be required to reveal sources and account for the expenditure of this money.
6. On floor crossing, the conference resolved that the particular conditions prevailing in a country (eg. electoral system) will determine whether floor crossing is appropriate. It also resolved that this issue needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency as it can negatively impact upon the quality of democracy and alienate sections of the voting public. Systems must be created to ensure that where the practice is retained, it must be done ethically, consultatively, morally and transparently to restore voter and public confidence.
7. The conference acknowledged the growing importance of political coalitions and alliances but noted however, that these coalitions need to be issue-oriented with long-term goals consistent with basic democratic tenets, including equity and power sharing. The coalition agreement should be reduced to writing and deposited with Parliament or the Independent Electoral Commission.
8. The conference resolved that:
 - the next meeting will be held in Kenya in 2009.
 - the chair of ESARP for the year 2008 is Malawi and the deputy chair is Zambia.
 - the chair for 2009 will be Zambia and the deputy chair will be South Africa.