

DEMOCRACY DIALOGUE



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West Bank/Gaza Elections: A Step Toward Democracy, Toward Peace

On January 20, 1996, more than 800,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem marked an historic event by voting in the first ever Palestinian general elections. The elections were the realization of a promise of democratic development outlined in the 1993 Declaration of Principles signed by Israel and the Palestinians. Palestinians elected the Head of the Executive Authority and 88 members of a self-governing Palestinian Council. The elections were universally judged free and fair.

USAID was among a group of donors that helped the Palestinians prepare for and administer the elections. Working through its implementing partners, USAID assisted the Elections Commission with the organization of the elections, financed the formation of a coalition of 40 Palestinian groups that organized a domestic monitoring team, trained 15,000 Palestinians in the election process and their rights and responsibilities in a democracy, with special focus on women, rural, youth and former political prisoner groups, and funded international elections observers.

The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) have been engaged in supporting overall democratic development in the West Bank and Gaza. In many cases, their programs encompass a variety of activities that have implications far beyond the elections. USAID also provided funding to the U.S. Information Service to work with Palestinian journalists on election coverage.

IFES reached more than 76,000 Palestinians through civic and voter education programs, and provided technical

assistance in drafting the elections laws. IFES also facilitated voter registration, trained poll workers, and developed media materials. Through Election Resource Centers for Education and Training in the West Bank and Gaza, IFES provided Palestinians with access to materials on elections and democracy and set up voter simulation workshops that helped reduce ballot spoilage from a pre-election level of 30 percent to three percent on the day of the election.

"By working with both Palestinian nongovernmental organizations and the Palestinian Authority, IFES assisted both the official and the civil sides," said

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1996: An Important Year for Democracy in Mongolia

This will be a significant year for democracy in Mongolia. July parliamentary elections will be followed by local government elections in the fall. Through grants to The Asia Foundation (TAF), totalling close to \$1 million for 1993 through June 1996, USAID has supported a number of efforts aimed at sustaining democracy in Mongolia.

"It is astounding, the commitment to democracy in Mongolia," said Nancy Yuan, TAF associate director. "Sometimes you wonder where it comes from, how it is that people are so interested in the role of the public in government, civic duty and such."

The July elections were particularly important as they were the first to run

under the new Election Law, which provides for single-member districts. (See box on page 4 for more details.)

"Mongolians should start to see electoral procedures regularized, so that it becomes a normal event to go to the polls," said Gordon Hein, TAF vice president. "And there should be a truer reflection of the popular will, a closer relation between elected members and their constituents."

USAID's strategy has been to create a pluralistic political environment by assisting the process of electoral reform, enhancing the workings of the parliament, educating voters as to their rights, and providing the electorate with the means and information necessary to make informed choices. In 1990,

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Working Together to Promote Democracy

Report Highlights USAID/NED Effort to Strengthen Collaboration

When a member of Congress raised concerns last year about possible duplication of efforts between programs to promote democracy supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Government-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED), USAID committed itself to an intensive six-month program review with NED to determine if any duplication existed and to develop recommendations for better collaboration. The report containing the results of the program review and recommendations was submitted to Congress on March 1, 1996.

The program review revealed that USAID and NED do not duplicate each other, but that greater coordination and sharing of information about respective programs would be helpful. Covering fiscal year 1994, the review found that in the 70 or so countries in which USAID worked, many of the programs were completely different in nature, with, for example, USAID providing support to voter registration and NED

providing support to civic organizations. In some cases, the two organizations were working on the same sector, but in a complementary manner. For example, both might be supporting the strengthening of the legislature, but USAID was focusing on internal structures and NED on external forces, seeking to make the legislature more transparent and accountable. Both are valid approaches to strengthening democratic institutions.

The cases in which USAID and NED worked with the same organizations at the same time were limited. In most of these instances, the purposes of the grants and the activities funded were different. For example, NED and USAID both gave a small grant to an NGO located in Burkina Faso, the *Mouvement Burkinabe des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples*. In this case, USAID provided a small grant to host the first of a lecture series on fundamental democratic principles; NED's grant enabled the organization to conduct a human rights education program, including a series of human rights workshops, conferences and training sessions, and the broadcast of 12 one-hour radio programs on human rights. Although the activities undertaken were quite different, they were complementary in nature.

In a few cases, USAID's and NED's programming appeared much more intertwined. In the West Bank and Gaza, both NDI and IRI initiated activities in civic education and public opinion polling, respectively, with NED funding that they later continued with USAID funding. The situation on the ground was changing rapidly, and USAID programming was responding month-by-month. Forcing a clearer delineation between USAID and NED activities would have undermined U.S. foreign policy interests during a delicate and fast-paced transition period.

The report concluded that the fact that USAID and NED have operated simultaneously in some of the same countries should not be cause for concern. In

fact, the comparative advantages of the two organizations can lead to a complementary working relationship on the ground. For example, one of the very positive relationships between USAID and NED occurs when NED identifies and works with a number of small, relatively high-risk local NGOs. In so doing, NED helps strengthen the capabilities of such organizations. The NGO can then qualify for larger, longer-term assistance from USAID. NED rightfully considers these as success stories and then seeks out new candidates for NED support.

USAID also has developed a special relationship with some of NED's core grantees, especially NDI, IRI, and the labor institutes affiliated with the AFL-CIO. NDI and IRI, with a unique specialty and their affiliation with international political congresses, have become important implementing partners for USAID. In general, they tend to start up new activities with NED funds, either because the activities are higher risk or are in countries where USAID is not yet in a position to operate. Over and over again, the program review found cases where NDI or IRI initiated a program with NED funds and then later expanded it with USAID funds.

The review was useful in increasing USAID's understanding of the interaction between NED and USAID in promoting democracy around the world. Staff have discovered that while little programmatic overlap exists relative to the scale of activities undertaken, more systematic coordination between USAID and NED will be helpful to ensure that overlap occurs only when it is clearly in the best interest of overall democracy promotion.

Specific actions and changes in procedures have been adopted to avoid duplication and to maximize the efficiency of the use of resources by USAID and NED in democracy promotion. The new procedures include regular consultations and sharing of program priorities and activities between USAID and NED

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West Bank/Gaza

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Keith Klein, IFES director of programs for Africa and the Near East.

In 1995, IFES identified three population groups needing special attention: rural women, released political prisoners, and youths. IFES quickly established partnerships with Palestinian NGOs and began a series of targeted democracy training workshops.

"It was very successful; we found good groups to work with," Klein said. "We worked on two levels: strengthening the NGOs themselves and helping to bring the democracy message to otherwise unreached groups."

Many of the women, he said, had questions related to how democracy fits into Islam, and what it means in terms of marriage, divorce, and other civil issues.

In the weeks leading up to the elections, IFES assisted the Palestinian Central Election Committee (CEC) officials by providing advice on ballot design and security, the registration process for former political prisoners, media campaign regulations, the design of a press center, and the distribution of election results. IFES also helped with the transportation of election workers and materials, and printing of the CEC identification cards worn by CEC election staff, international observers, and the press.

NDI's Civic Forum, a civic education program, engaged more than 4,000 Palestinians in discussions on fundamental ideas related to democracy and the way in which these concepts relate to the political transition in the West Bank and Gaza.

"Civic Forum helped reduce public uncertainty about the Palestinian election process by directly providing thousands of potential voters with information about all aspects of the process," said NDI Program Officer Aaron Azelton.

"In many villages, refugee camps and bedouin settlements, Civic Forum

discussion groups, and posters were the only accurate and timely sources of election information," Azelton said.

"In addition, Civic Forum also had an inherent organizational ability to receive and disseminate new information through its network of more than 200 community organizations and 4,000 regular monthly participants in a matter of a few days."

"This proved useful since the election framework was not fully defined until only two weeks before election day and the information had to be conveyed to the Palestinian public quickly," Azelton added.

In coordination with The Carter Center in Atlanta, NDI sponsored two delegations of international observers: one reported on the pre-election process, and the other, led by former President Jimmy

entation on issues, and voter priorities. Freedom of the press and human rights were considered very important issues to the Palestinian voters, as is the economy and the continuation of the peace process, according to poll results.

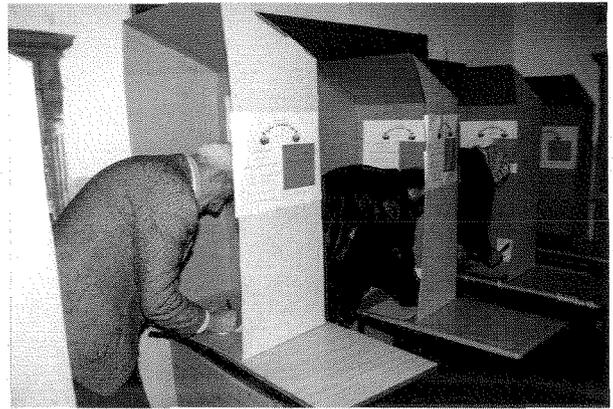
"It was the first time ever that exit polls were conducted in the Arab world," said Lauren Ross, IRI program officer for the Middle East and North Africa. "Overall, it was a very positive experience; a good first step in the right direction."

The exit polls were designed to get a better understanding of Palestinian expectations and who, in fact, was voting, Ross said. The polls revealed that Palestinians both want and expect elected Council members to have as much if not more authority than that of the President, and to play a large role in decision-making regarding decisive issues.

Using the collected data, IRI created district profiles so that Council members would gain a clearer idea of who voted for them and why. The data was also used by women's groups to find out where voter education efforts might be targeted: 58 percent of the voters were men and 42 percent women overall, but each district had a different profile.

USAID Administrator J. Brian Atwood traveled to the West Bank and Gaza with Vice President Al Gore to look at elections preparations.

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Palestinians casting votes in the West Bank.

Photo: Terry Melia



Inside a polling station in East Jerusalem.

Photo: Terry Melia

Carter, observed the elections. NDI also organized and funded the creation of a coalition of 46 local NGOs, which formed the Palestinian Domestic Monitoring Committee, which deployed 2,000 local volunteer election observers.

One of IRI's most significant contributions to the Palestinian elections was its election-day exit polling, conducted in collaboration with the Center for Palestinian Research and Studies. The exit polling yielded a lot of meaningful data on the electorate such as voter demographics, leadership criteria, voter turnout, voter ori-

Mongolia

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Mongolia requested TAF assistance in making the transition to democracy and a number of USAID-funded programs were started up. In 1993, TAF opened an office in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital.

"We were really starting from ground zero, helping to put in place all the basic building blocks of democracy, from drafting of the constitution to basic planning of parliament," Hein said.

In Mongolia, there was a need and an opportunity for a fresh start, he added, unlike in many other countries in transition where lingering doubts, even hostility, made the transition much more difficult.

"It has been a great environment to work in," Hein said. "All these people working in the same direction, toward the same goals, with openness and commitment coming from the top."

Mongolian history would seem to belie the current state of affairs. The legacy of Ghenghis Khan and his warlord successors bolsters the image of a traditionally tribal, nomadic people. Mongolia was the first Asian country to adopt a Soviet-style political system in 1924 and for the next 66 years, the communist Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) ran a one-party state, until the democracy movement began to sweep through Eastern Europe.

The largest landlocked country in the world, with resident animals outnumbering people 11 to 1, Mongolia has a young, well-educated voting public, with more than two-thirds under the age of 30, and a literacy rate of 95.7 percent for women and 98.2 percent for men (1994 estimates, UNFPA). Nearly one half of the population of 2.1 million lives in Ulaanbaatar or in other urban or semi-urban centers, where they work in factories or government offices.

Following a bloodless democratic revolution in 1989, the Mongolian Constitution was amended in 1990 by the existing parliament, the State Great Hural, to create a new interim parliament, the *Baga Hural*. The first multi-party free elections were held under

international supervision and the MPRP retained power, winning 85 percent of the vote. That same year, P. Ochirbat, an MPRP member and former cabinet minister, was elected president by the State Great Hural.

The *Baga Hural* drafted Mongolia's new constitution, which was approved by the State Great Hural and promulgated in February 1992. The constitution mandated the creation of a new unicameral parliament and three separate branches of government.

Opposition Party Wins Big in Mongolian Elections

On July 1, 1996, Mongolia's Democratic Union Coalition won a sweeping victory in the national parliamentary elections.

The two-party democratic alliance won 50 of the 76 parliamentary seats in the State Great Hural, ousting the formerly communist People's Revolutionary Party, which had ruled for nearly 75 years. Coalition leader Gonchigdorj, a former vice president and parliamentary speaker, said the group would try to form its new government by the end of the summer.

The larger coalition partner, the National Democratic Party, won 34 seats, the Social Democratic Party won 13, and nonparty candidates running under the coalition banner won 3.

At a press conference held two days after the elections, the coalition promised speedier economic reforms, greater freedom of the press, steps against corruption, and greater attention to human rights.

The ruling party had been expected to retain power with a reduced majority, so the opposition's landslide victory came as a surprise. Former Secretary of State James Baker, an election observer, had said that a win of only 20 seats for the coalition would be a healthy step toward democracy.

In June 1992, the first free and fair elections under the country's new constitution were held: the MPRP won 71 of the 76 seats in the new parliament, and a new government was formed under Prime Minister P. Jasrai. In 1993, presidential elections were held, and P. Ochirbat won this time as an opposition candidate.

Several important laws that will strengthen the framework for democracy were passed in 1995. These include the Civil Service Act and the Law on Control and Auditing of State Management. An anticorruption law was passed this spring. Other draft laws currently before parliament deal with the regulation of NGOs and the creation of an independent media. This represents progress, but Mongolia still faces major challenges.

"They are not out of the woods yet," Yuan said. "Democracy is hard, it's a difficult process." Much of the popular support for the MPRP, she speculated, is rooted in its connection to a relatively stable past. "It takes time to realize there is no longer a benefactor."

As in most former Communist countries, the transition to democracy is linked with painful economic realities and the social consequences of emerging free markets. In 1990, real economic activity began a sharp decline. Mongolia had depended almost entirely on the Soviet Union and with the collapse of the Communist government in Moscow, found itself unable to obtain basics such as oil, medicines, and spare parts. Ninety percent of Mongolian trade had been conducted with Russia and former Soviet-block countries.

Today, although an ongoing energy crisis remains acute, the Mongolian economy is on the upswing, with a GDP expected to show positive growth for the second year in a row (4-5 percent), and a trade balance surplus for 1995. International oil companies have begun drilling operations and uranium mining in the northeastern province of Dornod. Consumer goods are increasingly available, but the prices are high for the average Mongolian. The unemployment rate stands officially at 7.6 percent, although some experts believe the actual

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CONFERENCE NOTES

Legislative Strengthening Conference in Bolivia

"Without parliamentary reform, one can't talk about reform of the state." With these words from his opening address, the Honorable Victor Hugo Cardenas, vice president of Bolivia, set the tone of the first international conference on legislative strengthening.

Held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, February 4-7, the conference was a joint project of USAID's Global Bureau Center for Democracy and Governance and USAID/Bolivia with support from its Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, in cooperation with State University of New York and Thunder and Associates.

More than 100 legislators, legislative staff, USAID, and other donor officers and legislative assistance professionals from around the world attended the conference. While most participants came from Latin America, organizations from the Philippines and Mozambique were also represented.

The conference focused on the central importance of legislative modernization in the developing world, and aimed to clarify issues and processes related to legislative strengthening; determine what has been most effective in strengthening legislatures; and contribute to the development of a publication outlining successful practices in strengthening legislatures.

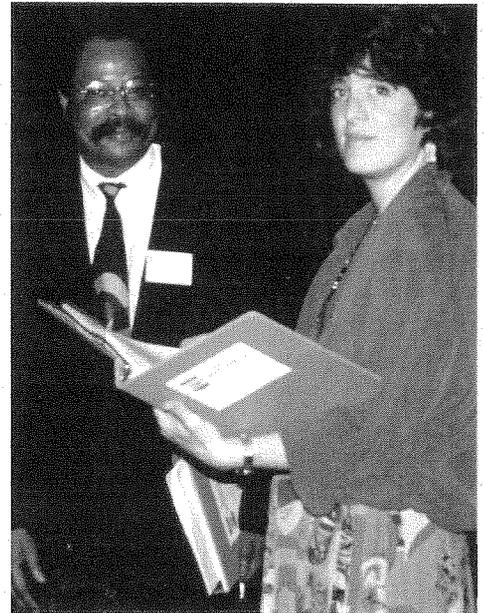
The conference content was organized around the themes of representation, legislative capabilities, and implementation. Eighteen sessions covered a wide range of subjects, including: responding to needs of society, enhancing citizen participation, women in legis-

latures, rules reform, budget and fiscal issues, and oversight of the executive.

Norma Parker from the LAC Bureau challenged participants in her opening remarks to take up issues such as: "Do donors need to be non-partisan in legislative assistance?" And G/DG's Patrick Fn'Piere asked, "Why is legislative strengthening important to productivity, peace, and rationality? How do you determine where to start with legislative assistance?"

The south-to-south dialogue promoted by the conference was highly praised by participants. Many said they felt they had more in common with LAC countries than with the United States, and found the conference exchanges valuable and relevant to their home situations, said Pat Isman, G/DG legislative strengthening specialist.

Gordon Hein, vice president of The Asia Foundation, articulated some of the assumptions that underlaid much of the conference discussion. Democracy is good, he said, and the more democracy the better. Legislative strengthening can be pursued without hampering other goals, e.g., economic growth, peace, relations with other countries. However, some countries seek harmony and consensus building, see separation of powers as overly divisive, or have experienced



Patrick Fn'Piere, USAID, and Susan Benda, NDI

that too many demands can leave a government unable to cope, resulting in a standstill.

Politics was a prevalent theme throughout the conference and participants tackled questions such as whether or not donors are able to provide ideologically neutral technical assistance to strengthen a legislature. Most agreed that this is difficult, if not improbable, because a legislature is a political institution composed of politicians. The distribution of power and influence will be affected by reforms

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From left to right: Victor Hugo Cardenas, vice president of Bolivia; Reynold J. Bloom, associate provost, International Programs, SUNY; Clay Wellborn, Congressional Research Service.

introduced, whether changes are primarily administrative or substantive.

Another issue surfaced at the conference, related to the above: Can a congress be modernized if political parties are not modernized? Conference attendees agreed that it is important to look at how legislators are elected, whether political parties' internal operations are democratic, and whether finances are transparent.

Many additional exchanges occurred involving the role of women in legislatures, bill drafting, and the role of the media.

Concurrent with the conference, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation is preparing a multi-country synthesis of USAID experience

and lessons learned regarding legislative strengthening. Their draft framework for analyzing country situations was presented and was well received by participants. (See box below.) □

For more information about the conference, contact Pat Isman, G/DG legislative strengthening specialist, (202) 663-2693; fax (202) 663-2797; or e-mail (pisman@usaid.gov).

To order conference proceedings, contact John Johnson, director of Democracy Development, State University of New York, SUNY Plaza, International Programs, Albany, NY 12246; phone (518) 443-5127; fax (518) 443-5126; or e-mail (jjohnson18@aol.com).

Democratization in Theory and Practice

USAID's Global Bureau Center for Democracy and Governance (G/DG) held a four-day training workshop, April 16-19, for USAID officers, entitled "Democratization Theory and Practice." The workshop was designed as an introduction to strategic development, performance measurement, and policy in democracy and governance. Thirty participants attended the workshop, representing USAID missions in 15 countries and USAID Washington.

Charles Costello, G/DG director, welcomed participants on the first day of the workshop, and assistant administrator for USAID's Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination, Colin Bradford, provided an overview of the relationship between democracy and sustainable development.

The first two days of the workshop were devoted to reviewing current research findings in democratic transition and consolidation, their implications for strategy, and the development of strategic objectives and results packages.

On the third day of the workshop, participants examined current practices in rule of law, legislative development, corruption prevention, and how to integrate democracy and governance across other mission strategic objectives.

On the final day of the workshop, participants discussed methods and practices for measuring performance and heard presentations on DG programming in post-conflict states and how they are addressed by USAID.

Participants agreed that the workshop was a useful introduction to DG programming and policy. The Center for Democracy and Governance plans to hold several more training workshops in Washington and in the field. These will concentrate on strategic programming and indicator development for DG Strategic Objective teams. □

For more information about the workshop, contact Chris Sabatini in G/DG; phone (202) 736-7880; fax (202) 736-7892; or e-mail (csabatini@usaid.gov).

Update: CDIE Legislative Assessment

The Agency's experience with direct assistance to legislatures is fairly recent. During the past year, the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE), working closely with the Center for Democracy and Governance, has been engaged in an assessment of legislative assistance by USAID and other donors. The assessment has two parts: impact evaluations conducted in five countries, and a cross-country synthesis.

The impact evaluations were conducted by teams of USAID staff members from different Agency bureaus. The specifics of the assistance and of the role of the legislature differed among the five countries. The Bolivian case is an example of fairly comprehensive assistance, where the driving force for change has been a Committee on Legislative Modernization. In El Salvador, assistance in the wake of the civil war has helped draw former combatants into a peaceful political dialogue and is transforming a rubber stamp legislature into one that is taking a more independent role.

The Philippine evaluation focuses on "external forces programming," assistance to a variety of private organizations directly involved in the legislative arena. In Nepal, assistance to get a new parliament functioning was part of a multi-pronged initiative supporting changes brought about by a democratic revolution. In Poland, legislative assistance was mandated directly by the U.S. Congress and focused on building up internal legislative information and research capacity. The last of the impact evaluation reports will be published by June 1996.

The last stage of the assessment is the preparation of a final "synthesis." This report, scheduled for publication in September, will present the varied types of legislative assistance identified by teams, and the lessons learned from that experience. It will develop an analytical framework to consider when legislative assistance is appropriate or inappropriate, and alternative ways it can be focused to address different problems related to the role or functioning of a legislature.

Democracy in Africa: Lessons Learned

USAID's Center for Democracy and Governance and the Africa Bureau co-sponsored a three-day conference, "Lessons We Are Learning from the Results of USAID Democratic Governance Programs in Africa," April 23-25, 1996, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The purpose of the conference was to take stock of USAID achievements in democracy and governance programming throughout the African continent, and to consider the implication of these lessons for future programming in the democracy and governance sector.

The conference brought together more than 70 USAID personnel, African representatives from nongovernmental organizations, the media, and host governments, U.S. implementing partners, and other scholars.

The first day of the conference was devoted to examination of broad trends in democratization and the challenges faced in Africa. Several speakers stressed the point that although nations are going through a liberalization of access to and use of political power, far fewer are entering the stages of consolidation of democracy.

The Honorable Dullah Omar, South Africa's Minister of Justice, delivered the keynote address on the challenges that South Africa has faced in writing a new constitution and forming a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to hear evidence of human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era.

"Democracy can never be sufficient for our people if it only means voting in elections every five years," Dullah said. "We need to develop mechanisms and procedures to enable all people to participate in decision-making that affects their own lives. It will not come overnight."

The conference then turned to specific subsectors of democracy: civil society, the media, elections and political parties, rule of law, and governance. A number of Africans who have participated in USAID-funded programs made presentations. Among them:

Souleyemane Kante, program coordinator for World Education in Mali, spoke about the positive impact parent associations have made in shaping education policy at local and national levels.

Fred Mmembe, editor of *The Post*, Zambia's only independent newspaper, spoke about the Zambian government's harsh attitude toward the free press, and the negative impact it has on the business of running a newspaper, particularly the ability to get regular advertisers.

Vincent Assiseh, press secretary of Ghana's National Democratic Congress, congratulated USAID on its work to improve the Ghanaian voter registry, and its efforts to help bring Ghanaian politi-

"We need to develop mechanisms and procedures to enable all people to participate in decision-making that affects their own lives. It will not come overnight."

*—The Honorable Dullah Omar
South Africa's Minister of Justice*

cal parties together to overcome a climate of mistrust in order to work on issues of mutual concern in the 1996 elections.

Roger Chongwe, former minister of legal affairs in Zambia, complimented USAID on its support for workshops sponsored around the country by the Zambian Constitutional Reform Commission. Zambians expressed their views on specific components of a new constitution; when the Zambian government had made significant changes to what emerged from these consultations, there was an outcry from political parties, the church, and NGOs.

Rene Lemarchand, USAID's regional democracy and governance advisor for West Africa, noted that results from policy initiatives to support decentralization in West Africa have been modest, rarely resulting in a real devolution of authority. He identified several key factors required for decentralization to succeed: an adequate legal framework, particularly local authority to raise funds; minimal institutional capacity to effectively run a local government; and decentralization of legal as well as political institutions to prevent corruption at the local level.

Before concluding, conference participants turned their attention to the role that policy dialogue can play in nurturing democracy in Africa. Ambassadors and mission directors spoke about their relationships with government officials and how they use the resulting dialogue to advance democratic development and shape USAID project assistance.

Participants then formed breakout groups, with each group determining lessons learned in a specific area. These were presented briefly in plenary session and will be reported on more extensively in the conference report.

The most important conclusion reached in the course of these meetings is that donor support for democracy and governance is a long-term process, at times subject to temporary setbacks or even reversals. USAID consequently needs to take a long-term view, building its projects up in response to opportunities that present themselves, and only after closely analyzing host government commitment to political reform. There is, however, no real substitute for a full-fledged democracy and governance program with a range of activities. □

Conference proceedings will be available this fall. For more information, contact Melissa Brown, USAID G/DG, Room 5258 NS, Washington, D.C. 20523; phone (202) 736-7979; fax (202) 736-7829; or e-mail (mebrown@usaid.gov).

USAID/NED

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staff, and a requirement to ask potential grantees if they are receiving funds from other USG sources.

At the April 25 hearing to discuss USAID's fiscal year 1997 budget request, Congressman Benjamin Gilman (Republican-NY), chairman of the U.S. House of Representative's International Relations Committee complimented the Agency on the report in his opening statement, calling it "serious, comprehensive, and forthright." □

For more information, contact Kim Mahling Clark, by phone (202) 663-2453; fax (202) 663-2772; or e-mail (kmahling@usaid.gov).

West Bank/Gaza

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Speaking of his experience there at the Middle East Policy Forum, shortly after his return, Atwood said, "without courageous leadership by both Palestinians and Israelis, strong American support, and a great deal of hard work, the elections would never have taken place and the peace process would have stalled."

In the short term, USAID is supporting preparations for the upcoming local council elections and providing technical assistance to the Palestinian Legislative Council on the development of a draft interim constitution. Longer term programs will focus on improving the capacity of the executive and legislature to

formulate and review policies and legislation, increasing the participation of civil society in the policy process and strengthening local government. □

Mongolia

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figure closer to 10 percent, and women are more affected than men.

Women's issues are a focus for USAID assistance to Mongolia, and one main program objective is to strengthen the institutions of civil society, based on the premise that the full and active participation of women in public affairs is essential for the development of democracy. Currently, women are greatly under-represented in key decision-making positions in all branches of government; their influence not nearly commensurate with their numbers, level of education, professional skills, energy, or creativity.

"The people you meet from Mongolia, including the women, are incredibly impressive," Yuan said. "Many of them were educated in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, usually speak at least three languages, and appear highly motivated."

Many of TAF's voter education projects in Mongolia have targeted women and been very successful, according to Yuan. This March, the Foundation brought over representatives from Mongolia's Women for Social Progress to observe voter education activities conducted during the presidential primary elections in the United States.

What accounts for the seemingly seamless transition to democracy after more than half a century of Communism, and a fiercer form of rule of nomadic tribal law for centuries before then? Hein said he believes it is in part a reflection of their strong desire for and commitment to national independence that resonates with basic principles of democracy: self determination, self government, self sufficiency.

"Independence and pride are very strong traits in the Mongolian national character," he said. "These underlie the interest in and support for democracy."

In addition, there is essentially no ethnic or religious conflict in Mongolia.

Last fall, Hillary Rodham Clinton made an historic visit to Mongolia. She toured the countryside on horseback, tasted a bowl of *airag*—a traditional nomad's drink (fermented mare's milk, know for its nutritional and medicinal value), and visited facilities for homeless children in a show of support for the country.

"Our nations are literally halfway around the world from each other, but we share many common values," she said. "Most of all, we are both democratic nations committed to the ideal of freedom and the belief that every citizen should be able to participate fully in civic life."

Together with The Asia Foundation, USAID is helping Mongolia realize a sustainable form of that ideal and belief. □



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"... promoting the transition to and consolidation of democratic regimes throughout the world."