

"Democracy"

African Leadership

Forum

Ota, 29-30 November
Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



AFRICAN LEADERSHIP FORUM
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Democracy

1. I will start with one problem that has been for me one of the most crucial questions raised throughout more than twenty years of public office.

I am speaking about the democratic system that respects and protects all human rights for all people without exception.

Universal declaration of human rights has been perceived by some as mostly an international agreement on civic and political rights.

However, the Universal declaration contains as well the imperative character of social, economic and cultural rights.

Maybe such an understanding has been the result of the fact that the drawing up of the international pacts on human rights took more than ten years with the Western countries and their allies defending the separation of the two types of human rights and the communist countries defending their equality.

It was then in 1966 that two pacts were approved: one dealing with civic and political rights, the other dealing with social, economic and cultural rights.

The preamble of boths pacts delines however that all these rights were interdependent.

We know now that in fact it was a rather twisted way the one followed by the communist countries in order to fulfill their protection of social rights.

But as the Cold War is over in military terms it should also be over in relation to ideological facts of the past.

Therefore, when we come to a time of interdependence of all issues, not only at world level but at every level of society, we have to come anew with the understanding and the proposal of democracy that defends equally all kinds of human rights.

In other terms this is why we used to say that democracy and development were just two faces of the same coin.

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1. We are facing a new political reality at the world level:

democracy has become the target for political action of individuals, communities, nation-States.

Democracy, in its best forms contains several ingredients which I want to underline at the outset:

- it is based on the principle of fundamental equality before the law and the State

of all individuals as living human beings;

- it repels all forms of discrimination (only started in XXth century - women!)

- it embodies, either by legislative acts or by tradition, a body of norms and rules

which all individuals and institutions have to follow, thus constituting a State of law;

- it is expected to express, throughout its structure, institutions and processes of decision making,

that sovereignty resides with the people

(Hence the importance of universal suffrage and free elections);

- it accepts and encourages the status of freedom and dignity of all the human persons, doing away with all threats to basic human rights and guaranteeing freedom of expression and association;

- it comes into being through a Constitution as fundamental law and through electoral laws as mechanisms intended to provide the expression of the popular will in all its shades and as a framework for the essential principle of accountability of those elected to their constituency or to the nation;

- it implies a balance of institutions and centers of power

in such a way as to provide democratic control of all institutions (media?)

- it welcomes and stimulates the dynamism of society

in all its forms (press, organizations, popular mobilization);

- it is rooted in the culture of the people

acknowledging by its forms, the ways in which individuals express themselves in a given society, how public affairs have been taken care of in the fabrics of society,

the modes and processes through which power is perceived

seized
or given.



When I make such a long list, I am well aware that such a democracy is almost non-existing.

I take for granted that democracy - which outside UK gained momentum with the French revolution - cannot remain linked with the conditions of the simultaneous phenomenon of industrialization.

Instead, it must become a full contemporary phenomena.

Democracy is a process, to be thought anew at every juncture of time.
I would even dare to say that a given country has become a democracy whenever its own process of democratization

takes stock of the new terms of the interdependence of all issues in our time,

and places itself as an active participant of the democratic process at the world level. Democracy at the national level is (and this is obvious for all of us) part and parcel of the broaden question of world governance.

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2.

For the process of democratization to take place with solid foundations at the international level it has to cover the all spectrum from the local to the global space.

Democracy at the local level gives blood and flesh to the national governors.

Moreover, it contributes greatly for the necessary decentralization.

In a way the boundaries and the national governors become somewhat blurred and may acquired less importance if we move towards the articulation of local entities at the regional level and most of all if we take into account and don't dismiss the fundamental questions of democracy in all governors.

Though the multilateral organizations have been flourishing unceasingly in the last decades, we cannot say that at the international level decisions are taken in a democratic way.

It is enough to see that questions relating to the world economy are not dealt with at Ecosoc and at the other multilateral bodies which have sprang up in the UN system, but are taken by the G7 which is formed by the seven richest countries in the world.

This implies obviously a fresh look at the international organization and enough imagination and candid determination to do away with the proliferation of international bodies and to build anew what is necessary for our time.

But all issues are interdependent and democracy is an all-encompassing ball.

I am well aware that this picture is one of hitherto unknown complexity.

Everything is connected with everything else. It does take therefore the best minds and skills of our countries to deal daily with such complexity

while the aspirations expressed in the street demonstrations speak of simple and immediate goals of standards of living, if not of survival.

Moreover, the different institutions of democracy are not used to deal with interdependent issues - it is enough to see how our governments are structured and

how each Minister clings to his own feud!

(Ex. European Parliament: construction industry)

Therefore the issues I am going to deal with are issues which have been challenges or stumbling blocks on my way.

I have more questions than answers.

But I have a few answers which will only require political strength and will.



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3. It is my firm belief that democracy and development are two sides of the same coin.

It has been difficult for Western countries to see this connection as their own experience of democracy took place alongside a continuous process of economic growth, prosperity and gradual building up of social security systems.

However, since the 70's, in some way as a result of the oil shock, questions started being raised about democracy

its institutions and the political classe which emerged through the Western type of democracy..
(e.g. Pierre Rosanvalon
Jacques Julliard
Viveret in France).

(The European institutions of the European Community have also contributed, particularly the European Parliament, to the awareness of important limitations in the present democratic system.

It is very clear, as it has been pointed out often in the European Parliament, that the Brussels Commission is not elected or chosen by the Government who happens to be in power, the Council of Ministers is not elected. Only the European Parliament is elected and yet the final political decision pertains to the Council.

In the European jargon, this is the democratic deficit of the European institutions.

What is strange, however, is that by the end of 92 more than 80 per cent of the economic and financial decisions will be taken in Brussels, thus taking away from national parliaments some of the flexibility in the budget and other decisions.

However, the political class, including national parliaments, does not seem to notice that!).

The steps taken a few years ago by 12 newly restored democracies seem to point out to a more vocal expression of the link democracy/development.

It was clear for Latin America, the Philippines, my own country, when they met in Manila, that the burden of the foreign debt, preventing development to take place, was creating the fear of a setback in the democratic process.

We see it now very clearly in Central and Eastern Europe. There is no denial of the craving for freedom.

But the freedom was the all-encompassing cry
for a better life
and more human conditions.

(In my own country, in 1974 and following years: people started to speak up about what they needed in order to live with dignity and fewer hardships.)



This does mean that there is a basic question about human rights.
The civic and political human rights
which express freedom and dignity v.a.v. the State, such as
freedom of expression and of association,
go hand in hand with
economic/social/cultural rights
which guarantee
food/shelter/education/work/information/medical care.

Or, in other terms,
one cannot in our time,
envisage a political democracy
where there is not a social
economic
cultural democracy.

(I know that this correlation has been one of the clivages in the
East/West confrontation
but the way we arrive at it today doesn't spring forth from an
ideological assumption
but from the assessment of facts in the last decades.)

Moreover, in an increasing interdependent world,
none of these aspects can be seen in isolation
or taken in a simple relation of cause/effect.

All interfere with each other in ways that sociology and political sciences
are continuously unfolding before our eyes.

It is the complexity of such interdependence and its continuous changing
pattern, that prevent us to apply any coherent "Gestalt" theory, which would give
foreseeable configurations.

At the same time, people want immediate answers to their needs, if
they were confronting very simple issues.

(Habitacao, já! Outra escola, já!)

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Hence, some basic questions:

- a) The satisfaction of "basic needs" can only be met in a sustainable way,
in the context of the medium and long-term perspective in the economic,
social and cultural field.

However, democracy as lived in the Northern hemisphere is sustained by
short-term mandates.

There is a definite problem here concerning what I call the continuity of
the governing acts, regardless of the persons who are at the helm.

A new ethics has to emerge by which any government has to avoid creating
negative conditioning to future governments (like exhausting the budget,
entering in sumptuary expenses, signing contracts at the end of its term,
etc.).

In the conduct of public affairs, "successors are neither enemies nor
rivals but legitimate heirs of the same political responsibilities, as
decided by the popular vote".





I know this is not the common attitude. But it is the only one that can assure that the power to be exercised is not power for its own sake, power over people and above them, acting at its own discretion.

It is rather power towards the accomplishment of the goals that can serve the people.

In my experience, if this attitude is not present, political democracy may be there with its elections and institutions but it won't eradicate misery and destitution.

- b) Another difficulty is to reconcile the work and time needed for the decisions which commit the long-term with the urgency the population feels (and rightly so!).

Because people get tired of problems - they don't elect people for the leaders to tell them how the problems are, they know them only too well; they expect the leaders to solve the problems!

How do you tell the Russians that the problem is not, to some extent, the lack of food but the fact that they need more and better railways and roads for the distribution of food ??

It is there that in transition periods, the use of task-forces working in close collaboration with the personnel of the Administration may be of great help. Even in countries of a relatively recent independence, the weight of public administration is already there.

(Director-General of Labour: "40 years at this table!").

There are other ways and means:

- a tremendous proximity to the people, to real life, to real issues: examples:
 - Filipe Gonzales, telling concrete consequences on TV
 - Tina Anselmi, while Minister of Labour, keeping one day a week to hear people and visit them in their places of work
 - my own attempt to take decisions on the spots where they mattered;
- a very clear mind for the spokesman of the Government, able to translate the arid decisions into understandable measures.

- c) Still within this context, one difficult problem is the way in which foreign investment is encouraged.

I see it in three levels:

- c1) the legal framework of the foreign investment, which determines what kind of goods can be purchased, the percentage of capital sharing in a new enterprise, the obligations in relation to the national norms (ITT-loan, exemption of contribution to social security, freedom to close up ... --- Cyrus Vance);
- c2) the technological choices: the need for a very competent team, without financial vested interests, to help the decision-making process. In order to avoid:
 - obsolete material (nuclear power stations)
 - outdated and polluting processes
 - satellisation in one specific field (pharmaceutical industry);



- c3) the delocalisation of enterprises, updated version of the international division of labour
- . cheap labour
 - . economic growth ... but is it legitimate?

I am stressing this aspect
because democracy ought to reinforce national sovereignty
and in some cases these processes make some countries
incredibly dependent on others.
(Sines ida à Alemanha em fim 75)

Need to show that our own process, if carried on honestly, needs to be explained over and over again
to ears and minds only at tune to their own institutions.

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4. Pluralism and elections

Within the "political conditionality" multi-partism gained such an importance that Poland, with all its passion, had 60 parties in the last elections!

Multi-partism is a way to make clear that the era of "one ruler" is over.

Two points of clarification are important, however.

First, what is at stake is basically an appeal to tolerance, respects for the other's opinion

and an acknowledgment that in a given society there may be divergent views about the solutions to be adopted.

Political parties are essentially the organized expression of such views.

According to modern constitutions they should express what is alive among the people. In fact, the polarization East/West and its correlated propaganda has also led the political parties to establish themselves as structures which sell their ideologies and impose them on people.

This is a fundamental perversion of the democracy.

We see in most European political parties their incapacity to absorb new ideas, to arise to new challenges, and to widen their own horizon.

Basically, this means that the State (which is the fortress to be conquered by political parties) is still dominating society.

For the parties to come back to express what is alive in society they need to change radically from what they are today. (consultation of socialist party).

To become what?

second This question leads me to the point of clarification.

Even pluralism is not the most adequate expression for democracy as power of all.

Wouldn't plurality of forms of association and organization define better what is at stake?

If the civil society precedes the State in the sense that it is there that the ideas that will guide the State will emerge, then it is the encouragement of an alive plurality that constitutes the best guarantee of a democracy.

(A country may have several parties, be considered a democracy and still include wars based on religions intolerance).

The political parties would take a less dominant rôle in the public eye if they would be part of a larger plurality of forces.



I consider extremely dangerous, paralyzing and, in the long run, destructive of the democracy, the tendency displayed in new democracies, like the one in my own country, to try to express the plurality of views in a society through the lines of clivage of the political parties.
(going on at every panel or even Church discussion).

Plurality has to find its way between the tendency to fall back into a homogenized, more simple culture and the extreme fragmentation that may characterize the transition period.

The fragmentation may be caused by differences in the set of ideas. But it may also be caused by the mere adherence to different leaders, because of their personal appeal or because of their ethnic belonging.

Elections are the moments when the plurality of opinions is universally expressed and the strength of each opinion is weighed.

a) This is why the freedom of elections, the absence of fraud or coercion, even a certain solemnity at the moment of the individual vote, are so important.

It is the moment for unequivocal affirmation of citizenship and its key-role in the direction a country is going to take.

The practice of international observers at national elections has increased.

For some politicians it remains disputable.

In my own understanding such practice must be looked at against the background of several events:

- In any case, at decisive elections, the foreign press is in the country and covers whatever it decides;
- I doubt that ad hoc groups, in a kind of self-appointed righteousness, it will be helpful. They hurt the dignity of the host country.
- On the contrary, a group of eminent personalities, without any vested interests in the country concerned and who are not members of the international associations of political parties, could be chosen by a democratic international institution, either regional or worldwide.
- Their task would be deeper than the vigilance or the uncovering of any trouble. It would be seen mostly as a sign of support and solidarity from the international community.

b) In the Northern hemisphere, there is, however, a type of coercion which is exercised through the media.

The media, under the alibi of "freedom of expression", is very often taking sides:

- through the way news are given and pressures undergone (British series - Mr Minister);
- through the attitudes of journalists present in debates among candidates;
- through the sub-liminal messages it conveys during the period of the campaign (Sassá Mutema during the election in Brazil, showing that a man from among the people would become necessarily corrupt - Lula).



We still are in the beginning of dealing with the media in a true democratic society:

- how to avoid the promiscuity between the media and the political class?
- how to make of the media what they should really be: a mediation in communication among the masses?
(Council of Audiovisual, Council of the Press).

c) Another - more sophisticated - interference are the opinion polls.

They are a help to weigh chances, to give an idea of the forces present in society.

But the way in which they are regularly published creates for democracy in general and particularly for elections, some serious dangers:

- polls often emit the wrong signals and, yet, they determine what the candidates are going to say next, twisting often their own starting-point and program;
- polls function as mirrors where naïvely individuals see themselves, and, if their intention of vote is not very strong, they interiorise what they see or hear. They identify themselves with the figures;
- this is possible because the analysis of polls by any media is based on the simple question:
who is going to win?

And in our societies people still want to be with the obvious winner.

It is my conviction that opinion polls need also a legal framework so as to create a space where no signals are emitted and where people can, in good conscience, come to a decision about their vote.

d) A fourth point in this context is the way in which a population gets tired of voting.

If the changes expected don't happen in a tangible way, the percentage of voters becomes smaller and smaller.

Recently in Switzerland...

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Consensus-building

One of the main tasks in a democracy is the creation of a communal will, or, as some people say, the process of consensus-building.

It is a key question in a time when there are no clear indicators for the future ahead.

It is decisive for the undertaking of major endeavours in a country.

In the Western democracies, we are in a deadlock in what concerns the communal will. The existing mechanisms are not enough for people to express themselves in due time and around the important issues. So the gap between the political class and the citizens is growing every day.

Its difficulties should, however, never be a pretext for falling back in any form of one-man or one-party rule.

I would like to tackle the main elements of this process, underlining the pitfalls and suggesting some new possibilities.

a) In spite of all I have said there has been a growing uneasiness in the Northern hemisphere concerning the current form of democracy.

In fact the representative democracy tends more and more to become just a formal democracy.

The elected persons are not connected anymore during his exercise of terms of office with their constituencies and the average citizen feels more and more that decisions are made without taking into account his or her thinking.

Several elements are at play in this dislocation of meaning.

Political parties, in most countries, have such a strict discipline of vote that the elected MPs instead of representing the views of their electors are representing the views of the political committee of their party (exception: EP and why).

In this context of party led decisions in parliament, we enter a contradictory process. It is true that a government which has won an absolute majority has better conditions to implement its decisions.

But with the party politics at play, we fall then easily into the governmentalization of the Parliament itself.

This is clearly one instance when we see a new perversion of the very idea of democracy.

Some politicians have been arguing that a true representativity leads every elected officer to obey to his constituency and to his conscious. This may lead him or her astray from the party line of action.

But this would create a much more dynamic formation of decisions through what has been called "majority of ideas".

MPs ruling around the solutions they consider right regardless of the party to which they belong.

This would introduce in political life the almost certainty that politicians are listening to the needs and opinions of the people and that the danger of politicking is avoided.

I recognise, however, that this creates in terms of the results to be expected a kind of unpredictability of the outcome.

I think however that the gains would be such that it is worth running that risk.

This is why in many countries in America as in Europe there are groups trying to claim another way for the representative democracy to function.



An obvious way of overcoming this difficulty is the recourse to a more participatory democracy.

I often ask myself why direct forms of democracy constituted within geographic or social spaces could not function as a concrete form of participation in the decision-making process.

I cannot avoid however to stress the fact that the countries in Europe which have a long tradition of direct democracy have also the highest rate of absenteeism in its frequent consultation to the people.

When big decisions are at stake, the possibility for referendum is certainly very important.

At the local level, it is a decisive instrument.

At the national level, if its terms are clearly spelled out, it can give to the citizens a good insight into the difficulties of the problems at stake.

The need to discuss in order to make up either his own minds appears also to me a tremendous process of political awareness and consciousness raising.

Finally, all forms of associations and organizations, however small, and however marginal, ought to be drawn into the process of decision-making.

I have been defending for several years the idea that the concept of social partners which in the North has a great weight in all decisions concerning social and economic areas should be enlarged.

At the dawn of the XXIst century, we cannot go on appealing only to the representatives of the capital and the labour when decisions are at stake.

The association of employers and trade-unions in a world where the structure of the production line has completely changed are not anymore the only groups to be consulted.

They serve, however, as a good model of what could be an organic process of consultation.

In society there are foci of problems which may concern broadly the school, the hospital, the agriculture, and so on.

The idea I am pleading for is the one of gathering a round big issues a group of people who are actively involved and concerned by the decision making related to that focus of society and who will be affected by its consequences.

Therefore, what I want to see is the definition in society of concrete issues and types of people in groups who are concerned with those issues.

These groups I call as well social partners.

(Cooperatives, consumer associations).

Of course, what I am pointing out is the cultural dimension of the process of decision making.

In some cultures, the decision making is taken by strong argumentative forms of confrontation.

In other cultures, it is taken through laborious process of unpublicized conversations.

Of course, between these two extremes there are all shades of processes which are the results of our own culture, even of our own language.



(English and French always obliged to say the subject of the verb, while in Portuguese you are not suppose to say the subject of the verb!).

There is cultural vitality in every society that the leaders cannot ignore and which are fundamental ingredients for establishing democratic institutions and democratic channels of decision-making.

(Portuguese experience of incapacity of political leaders and intellectuals to translate into democratic forms the tremendous wave of popular participation which has shaken the country for more than two years.)

Important elements of this cultural vitality are all forms in the expression of the arts.

Hence, the necessity of anthropological and sociological surveys.

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The people don't believe anymore in the competence and capacity of achievement of their leaders.

The Reagan years have certainly contributed everywhere to transform the political debate into a political biz-show, into yet another spectacle (?).

The reaction of the people is rejection and a total disbelief in the political class (Bernard Kouchner).

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Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

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