

Democracy taking root in the Mideast

*In the name of God,
The most compassionate, the
most merciful
Your Excellencies, Honourable
Guests of Qatar, Ladies and
Gentlemen,*

I WOULD like to welcome you in Doha at this forum, which provides a good opportunity to consider the relation between freedom of trade exchange, development, and the advancement of democratic practice, which became clearer and gained strong momentum after the end of the cold war.

Democracy, development and free trade complement each other and none could be implemented separate from the other. In developing countries in particular, democracy could not be attained without effective development in all economic and social fields. Political freedom is meaningless in a community in which poverty prevails and in which a big section suffers from ignorance disease and unemployment. Likewise sustainable development could not be achieved unless the citizen is allowed to participate in decision making and to protect his economic interests.

The same thing applies to free trade since its desired positive results in favour of development are linked to the existence of a world order that guarantees equal opportunities for all countries and peoples of the world in a way that helps narrow the current economic gap between them. To achieve the desired benefits from democracy, development, free trade and the consolidation of the new world order there is an urgency to carry out a comprehensive political economic and social reform in developing countries to help them accelerate development that will be beneficial to all categories of the people.

It is also imperative that advanced countries understand the problems of the developing

countries and translate that practically into the agreements to be concluded in the frame of the World Trade Organisation to assist those countries develop their own capacities to be able to cope with competition required by the new world order.

Though our area was unable to keep pace with turning to the market system and democracy, it had a leading old experience in which trade exchange was combined with cultural openness, and religious tolerance with economic prosperity in an atmosphere of peace and stability. For centuries the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf and the Mediterranean were considered lakes of peace and cooperation and open areas for trade and cultural exchange between Islamic, European, Chinese and Indian civilisation. In the history of this area, exchange was not mere profession but an integrated culture which recognised the other, reflected self confidence and the desire of coexistence and acceptance of diversity and differences, which are fundamental human values in democratic societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past five years, our area has been witnessing a controversy over the issue of democracy and has been pulled back and forth over this issue with variant reaction ranging from acceptance to rejection and from enthusiasm to disinterest.

This controversy has started and it is necessary that it continues until the reform message reaches its end, so that the citizens of this area get their due share of political and economic freedom.

The success of democracy in this area is not only in its interest but also will have a tangible strategic impact on a wide geographical circle extending to the East and to West.

The consolidation of security in areas not far from us, and reducing the rates of legal and

illegal immigration to them will be affected by the democratic process in our area, because the success of the democratic project is essential for addressing the manifestations of tyranny and corruption that still devour the peoples fortunes, deprive them of their rights and push some of its citizens to extremism and alienation.

Of no less significance, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is the role of free media and encouraging its organisations because they contribute to rectifying the democratic process and practice.

Honourable Audience,

The challenges facing the change towards democracy in our area have not prevented lately the birth of a unique experience in practicing democracy that deserves all commendation and respect. The Palestinian people despite their sufferings under the grip of occupation, insisted on exercising their legitimate right to choose their government. Their national authority was also keen on providing guarantees for exercising this fundamental right by its people.

So the parliamentary elections were held and all those who followed it, including those who could not so far tolerate its results or accept the will of the Palestinian people, have acknowledged its transparency and fairness.

The civilised way in which the Palestinian political forces have dealt with the results of these elections reflects a commitment to what is decided by the collective will and the acceptance of the citizen's free choices. This calls upon advocates of democracy all over the world to respect the decision of the Palestinian people.

This important Arab experience should be supported and encouraged rather than putting pressure on it or interfering with the right go the people to choose their leaders or threaten to withhold aid to them.

Challenging the choices of



peoples will only result in fuelling the feelings of despair and generate waves of wrath. Moreover, opposing the popular will contradicts the spirit of democratic option that calls for compliance with what the majority decides.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Establishing the regional security could not be completed unless democratic practice makes progress, because security is not just military arrangements agreed upon by states. It requires internal political measures which enable the citizen to participate in the affairs of his country and shoulder his responsibilities. In fact, the participant citizen is a secure citizen because he knows his rights and duties. It is the secure citizen who builds a secure homeland, which in turn establishes a regional system enjoying security and stability. Therefore, the desired security cannot be attained without the progress of democracy.

Within this conviction the State of Qatar has been keen on supporting efforts exerted to help the area improve and reform its affairs, and has recently contributed ten million dollars to the UN Fund for Democracy. Moreover, Qatar offered a similar sum and expressed full willingness to host the main office of the

Foundation for Future which is concerned with promotion democratic practice and reform efforts in the area and bear all relevant responsibilities and commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This area is in a pressing need to finalize a major project which it has already launched and has to carry on with it for its own interest and the interest of the world as well. At the forefront of this project is democracy, not only as a mechanism for decision making but as a way of life that is directly involved with the essence of its peoples' aspirations for development, progress and building a better future which was supposed to be attained several decades ago. However, it exerts more efforts today to attain it, and has the right to get enough international support and backing to help the reform message achieve its goals. It is necessary to remember, Honourable Audience, that our area has never complained of the too many who extended help to her to attain democracy, but rather complained of their shortage.

I thank you for your attendance and participation and wish your forum all success.

May the peace, the mercy and the blessing of God be upon you.

- QNA