

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Unofficial Translation

The Address of His Highness

**Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani,
Amir of the State of Qatar**

At

**Doha 7th Forum on
Democracy, Development and Free Trade**

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**In the Name of God,
The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful**

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I welcome you all to the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade in its Seventh session. Since its 1st session, your forum has passed through a period of time which, I consider enough to review the progress of the basic issues with which the forum is concerned.

I start with democracy where the interest in its development in our region has grown during the past few years. The hope was that the region would make up for the time it missed and make a shortcut to catch up with the global march to freedom. But you know that what has been achieved so far is not up to the aspired level. Of late, there has even been a sort of lassitude and slackness in pushing forward the reform process with the pretext that the conditions in the region do not allow.

No two persons would disagree that the prevalent circumstances in the Middle East are still highly sensitive and complicated. However, that is not a justification for evading the democratic process. The region had previously experienced the deferring, if not freezing, comprehensive reform for many years, using all kinds of pretexts until its problems piled up and its crises increased. Therefore, it should not make the same mistake again under the false impression that the relative abatement in the international concern about the advancement of democracy in the area would bring things back to their previous stagnation.

The greatest mistake, in my judgment, is to subject the progress toward democracy or retreat from it to messages coming to the region from abroad, or to the degree of external interest in its affairs, or to external pressures put upon it. This is an immature conception that ignores the free will of the people and their right to

live a sound political life where freedoms are respected and where all people enjoy all rights, on top of which is the right to participation in public affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Any review of the democratic process in our region has to probe into the causes that led to its slowness and delay. First, I would like to refute any call trying to attribute that to the culture of the region which is based on the teachings of Islam; those sublime teachings which instruct their followers to be forgiving, urge them to be tolerant, make Shura and the rendering of advice obligatory, and stress the sanctity of human rights. We all know that these principles are the core of democratic practice.

Moreover, if some in the west have slacken or given up their support to the democratic project in the region, yet that will not dissuade its peoples from that project nor will it become a thwarting factor to their right to popular participation, because people are always responsible for their destinies. We should not forget that some in our region have paid a very high price to achieve political and social reform, and gave all that was dear and precious long before the outside world showed its interest in this issue. It is therefore unjust to imagine that reform does move only under foreign influence. And what took place recently in Mauritania is a clear evidence to this. In this connection, I would like to take this occasion to extend congratulations to our brothers in Mauritania on the success of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy in transferring power in a democratic way to a civilian government through free elections that respected the will of the people and their right to participation.

The main reason for the democratic incapacity, in my view, Ladies and Gentlemen, is due to the lack of correct understanding of reform, which must be comprehensive and deep and not partial nor intermittent. There can be no economic reform without political reform, which must be supported and guided by social reform. In my view, reform is not a list of options from which we choose, nor a collection of issues some of which can be deleted or deferred. The success of political reform is correlated to the success of social

reform, because democracy, like any political practice, depends on the state of society and the way of interaction among its individuals. Unless social relations among people are based on tolerance, belief in freedom, acceptance of diversity and the right to differ, democracy would not develop nor would reform be complete.

The reform experience in Qatar has paid great attention to the development of our social system according to a vision that makes our true religious and national values compatible with the spirit of the age and its requirements. We focus in particular on education as an effective means for sound social upbringing that makes way for creative thinking and makes dialogue, collective work, and sharing responsibility an indispensable course to decision making. While consolidating this new social system needs time and effort; yet it is a prerequisite for the political reform to bear fruit. We in Qatar are proud that our first legislative elections, for which we are getting ready, will take place under a social system that is aware of the value of participation and its benefit for the present and future of the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While our region is going through a slow transitional process toward democracy, on the contrary to that, it is going through another fast process of mounting threats and dangers. Attention must be drawn here to the nature of the human fabric of our region, which is one of the richest in the world in its cultural, religious, ethnic and denominational composition. This always calls for the cooperation among all to ward off all sorts of sedition. In this respect, we stress the importance of restoring security and stability in Iraq, where the events taking place there affect the safety of a wider regional circle. We affirm that the addressing of Iraq's problems must remain in the hands of the Iraqis themselves. We hope that they can soon be able to rebuild their country on the basis of equality in citizenship under a democratic system that guarantees their security and maintains Iraq's unity and integrity.

We have to caution that any hasty move could lead to triggering a new conflict in the region, which is certainly not in need of it. As much as we know that the issue of Iranian nuclear program is a sensitive one, we believe that solving it through peaceful means is the most appropriate approach. That is why I think the interest of all parties necessitates a commitment to diplomatic action for the settlement of that issue in such a way that the desire for peace prevails over the unjustifiable rush to confrontation, in order to build a world based on cooperation and not hatred, and seeks rapprochement rather than establishing axes.

I must also reaffirm that establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East that restores the usurped rights of the people in Palestine, the Golan Heights and Shabaa Farms is indispensable for the region to surpass one of the most severe adversities to which it has been exposed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Reviewing the democratic process in the region, and the challenges it has faced lately, cannot be complete without reviewing the state of development in it. Democracy, as you know, functions better when supported by comprehensive development. Though figures indicate that the region has seen some increase in the rates of development during the last few years, development cannot be measured by figures alone but by the feelings and reactions of the people and the security and assurance they have in their present day and future. And this requires major projects and creative economic ideas to which regional and international resources and capabilities are amassed, because fostering development and increasing the share of the Arab World in World Trade are two bases necessary for establishing comprehensive regional stability that reinforces and supports world security.

Before concluding my address, I have to affirm that the region's march toward democracy, development and the age of free trade, even if it is slow at times, will go on and be completed because it is guided by man's instinctive desire for freedom and his endeavour

for progress and advancement. The Arab citizen will not depart from the course taken by all those who achieved freedom. Moreover, his legitimate economic aspirations for a better future are not illusionary. At the same time, it has to be stressed that the region must make that march by itself, and that the world ought to back it in accomplishing that mission efficiently.

I hope, Ladies and Gentlemen, that your Forum would continue its role in supporting that mission because it is in the interest of the entire world to back the progress of democracy and the success of development in the Middle East in as much as this region participates with its resources and potentials in international development and prosperity.

Thank you, and I wish your Forum success.

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