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**RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VITAL FOR DEMOCRACY, ESPECIALLY IN  
ARAB WORLD.**

**SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS IN MESSAGE TO REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN YEMEN**

Following is Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message to the Inter-Governmental Regional Conference on Democracy, Human Rights, and the Role of the International Criminal Court, held in Sana'a, Yemen, from 10 to 12 January, as delivered by Danilo Turk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs:

I send my greetings to all participants in the Inter-Governmental Regional Conference on Democracy, Human Rights, and the Role of the International Criminal Court. I am glad that this conference is being held in Yemen, where important steps have been taken in recent years to promote democracy and human rights. I am also particularly pleased that civil society representatives are taking part in your discussions, since non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in promoting the participation of all sectors of society.

In recent decades, our world has witnessed a growing and welcome commitment to democracy. We have seen a steady trend towards the establishment of democratic forms of government. Today, from Latin America to Africa, and from Europe to Asia, democracy is more widely accepted and practised than ever before.

Democracy means more than the functioning of effective representative institutions. It means upholding fundamental principles -- particularly the rule of law and respect for human rights. The rule of law -- and its pre-eminent condition, equality before the law -- is the platform upon which the edifice of democracy rests. Respect for human rights is vital for the democratic edifice to stand. In fact, a symbiotic relation exists between the two: human rights are necessary for the functioning of democracy, and a functioning democracy is essential to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights.

Effective democratic systems allow for the peaceful articulation of demands and resolution of competing claims, thereby promoting a sense of justice and social unity. They are thus vital antidotes to extremism and terrorism. Violent extremists find fewer recruits in societies where government is by the consent of the people, the rule of law is respected, and human rights are guaranteed and promoted.

Democracy belongs to the people. It cannot be imposed from the outside. Different national characters and cultures produce different sorts of democratic systems. However, effective international cooperation is important in encouraging the building of true democracy. Your conference is a welcome instance of this cooperation. For our part, the United Nations, its agencies and programmes, give more and more assistance to democratic processes throughout the world. We stand ready to expand the help we give.

Justice and accountability are essential for the rule of law to be upheld in democratic societies. At the international level, the creation of the International Criminal Court was an historic advance in efforts to support justice and prevent impunity. However, the pace of ratification of the Rome Statute needs to be stepped up in some regions. I urge those of you who are government officials to work towards that goal.

The principles I have mentioned matter in all parts of the world. But they are particularly vital in your region, where deficits of freedom, women's empowerment, education and knowledge continue to impede the creative potential of societies, breeding frustration and despair. Strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law is critical to achieving social progress and modernization, and to meeting the challenges of development.

That is why I welcome the convening of this conference. It is an important sign of the commitment of the Arab world to the strengthening of democracy, and of the support of the international community for Arab efforts towards that goal. In that spirit of friendship and respect, I wish you every success in your deliberations, and I look forward to learning of the results you achieve and the practical steps you will take.

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