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Archieve Speech

« **November 2007** »

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Speech

Nusa Dua, Bali, 12-11-2007

Keynote Address at The Opening of The 40th Annual Conference on International Association of Political Consultants (and Reception of The Democracy Award on Behalf on Indonesian Citizens)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
 DR. SUSILO BAMBANG YUDHOYONO
 PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA
 AT THE OPENING OF
 THE 40TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLITICAL CONSULTANTS
 (AND RECEPTION OF THE DEMOCRACY AWARD ON BEHALF OF INDONESIAN CITIZENS)
 NUSA DUA BALI, 12 NOVEMBER 2007

Thank you for your nice introduction.

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,
 President of the International Association for Political Consultant, President of the Asia Pacific Association for Political Consultant,
 Distinguished Guests and Participants,
 Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by welcoming all of you, members of the International Association of Political Consultants (IAPC) to Bali, Indonesia. Bali has been voted the best island in the world many times over by several international travel magazines. And as you spend more time here to get to know the land, the people and the culture, it will be obvious to you why this is so.

The Balinese has also proved that they are not just talented artists but also incredibly resilient: they responded with grace and courage from terrorist attacks, and now they are back on their feet.

Next month, Bali will have the honor to host a major United Nations conference to address the biggest issue of our time: climate change. I hope members of the IAPC too will marshal your moral and political support for the international efforts to address global warming, on which hangs the fate of our planet and the future of the human race.

This, I am informed, is the first time in its 40 years of existence that the IAPC is holding its Annual Worldwide Conference in Asia. Well done. And I suppose my question would be: WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

I am also delighted that the IAPC has decided to give the Democracy Award this year to the citizens of Indonesia, the first time ever it is given to citizens rather than to a person, which I will be very honored to receive and have received on behalf of my fellow Indonesian citizens.

Thank you for this recognition, and I supposed my question would be: WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

There is one word to describe what is happening to Indonesia: transformation. It is more than just change. It is more than reforms.

When we say that we are the world's third largest democracy, they are essentially telling the world that Indonesia has been fundamentally transformed into a different nation.

They say nations that reach greatness are those who have the ability to reinvent itself. Well, I do believe that Indonesia is in the transcending process of redefining itself. And like all process of change, it is bound to be rife with endless criticism, occasional self-doubt, stubborn resistance, and numerous hurdles. But Indonesia remains on the right track.

It is critical to remember that democracy cannot be taken for granted. There are many cases around the world where democracy falters, stagnates, decays, crumbles, or reverse itself. And there is no single cause why. Sometimes it is because authoritarian tendencies were too strong. Other times its because inability of the political elite to embrace democratic rules or because democratic institutions could not develop.

In any of these circumstances, an economic crisis, or internal security threat, or a political scandal, could easily trigger the collapse of new democracy.

Indonesia is one of the last countries that joined the so-called Third Wave of democracy that began in mid-1970's. The democratic transition in Indonesia—with the world fourth largest population, the world's largest Moslems population, in one of the world's most ethnically diverse nation—was one of the momentous events in this Third Wave of democracy that swept the world at the end of the 20th century.

I remember those early days of democracy well. There were many skeptics.

Democracy, some said, would not last long in Indonesia. The people were not ready. The country was too big. The nation was too complex. Democracy, they said, would lead to chaos and even the break-up of Indonesia. Others said what happened in Indonesia was just "regime change". My favorite columnist Thomas Friedman lamented that Indonesia was becoming a "messy state". And there are those who predicted democracy would unleash extremism and radicalize Indonesian politics.

Because of these concerns, many Indonesians were as excited as they were anxious about Indonesia's political journey into this un-chartered territory of democracy.

Today, we can take a sigh of relief as the good people of Indonesia has convincingly refuted these concerns:

- Our democracy has become stronger and more vibrant than ever;
- Indonesia successfully held what is said to be the world's largest and most complex elections—peacefully;
- Rather than breaking apart, Indonesia is becoming even more united, as reflected in the Aceh peace deal;
- Rather than becoming a bastion of radicalism, the heart and soul of Indonesia remains moderate and progressive. Indeed, in Indonesia democracy, Islam and modernity go hand-in-hand effortlessly together;
- And despite the early years of turbulence, where we changed Presidents four times in the four years between 1998-2002, our democracy is now producing political stability and economic growth, the highest since the financial crisis.

Indeed, I would say that democracy in Indonesia has reached a point of no return. There are many signs to this:

- We have safely passed the "two elections" test, and also passed several Presidential change-overs peacefully.
- We have radically and fundamentally changed the political landscape in Indonesia, as a result of our national and local direct elections.
- We have instituted strong military reforms where the function of the TNI, apart from

defending the territory of the state,
is also to guard democracy and reforms.
- Not with standing political problems that sometimes arise, unlike in other democratizing countries, there has never been any concern about an impending c'oup.
- And there are countless public opinion polls showing that even though the public may lose faith with politicians, institutions or policies, their faith in the value of democracy remains unshaken and in fact only increased over time.

The conclusion is crystal clear: democracy is here to stay in Indonesia permanently.

Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen,
Indonesia has proved that no matter the size of population, the difficult geography, ethnic diversity, political complexity or historical background, democracy can come and grow. This is not a lesson unique only to Indonesia: many other democracies of all size and shape have found this to be the case.

A question arises: Why has democracy succeeded in Indonesia?

Well, there are many explanations, but a key one would be that our democracy has been people-driven from the start. It is a bottom up process of change. When the torch of reformasi began in 1998, it was a movement from below, and quickly captured public nerve and energized the nation. Reformasi captured the country's aspiration in 1998 the same way "independence" captured the spirit of the nation during our revolution of 1945.

I would say that Indonesia's modern day instinct has always been democratic because of its people-oriented spirit. This democratic spirit is reflected in many of Indonesia's key political jargons, such as "kerakyatan", "gotong royong", "musyawarah", "kesejahteraan sosial", and so on.

It is this same "people impulse" that drove reformasi and made democracy work in what was a difficult transition for Indonesia. It was the people's hopes and aspirations that gave Indonesian democracy the oxygen and the fuel it needed to survive and grow.

It is therefore very fitting that the IAPC democracy award should be given to democracy's greatest stake-holders: the citizens of Indonesia. Once again thank you.

The citizens of Indonesia that have full ownership of Indonesian democracy.

In the 2004 elections, around 100 million voters came out to vote in each of the three Parliamentary and Presidential elections. That is an average voting turn-out of around 80%, significantly higher than most industrial countries. And they turned up because they understood perfectly well that by casting a ballot, they had a real choice to make about the future of their country.

But let us not forget that our democracy is a work in progress.

Democracy is journey that never ends. It took the British democracy 792 years from the Magna Carta, the American democracy 231 years from the Declaration of Independence, and the French democracy 218 years since the French Revolution, to get to where they are now. And even today these democracies are still evolving.

Indonesian democracy, just short of a decade old, will also continue to evolve. I do not have a crystal ball to predict where and how our democracy will evolve over the long term.

But I would like to offer several points that would be critical to that process.

First, it is important that Indonesia's democracy becomes even more anchored, more grounded on the people. This is an important challenge because of many decades, Indonesian politics gravitated around the elite. Indonesians have complained about feudalistic tendency in our political culture. This elitism is unhealthy for our democracy, and indeed was a factor behind the rampant disease of corruption, collusion and nepotism which harmed our development for many years.

Today, politics gravitate around the people. Leaders, politicians must earn their votes to be elected to public office.

This is a democratizing trend that must always be strengthened and brought as far as possible. When the current political term ends in 2009, all of Indonesia's Governors, local Parliamentarians, regents and mayors will be directly elected by the people in free and fair elections. What this means is that the pyramid of power will have been completely turned upside down.

But bringing democracy to the people means more than just organizing elections once every five years. It means that leaders must adapt by evolving a new political culture of participatory politics.

In this new political culture, the people must have constant access and genuine say to their leaders and to government policies. Leaders must learn to evolve a new methodology of governance to produce a responsible and accountable governance that would be the essence of a healthy democracy.

Secondly, as Indonesia's democracy matures, it is critical to ensure that democracy is coupled with rule of law, and tolerance. I keep saying this again and again to my fellow Indonesians.

Absolute freedom does not work. Democracy without rule of law will lead to chaos. And democracy without tolerance will lead to decay. Without rule of law and tolerance, democracy will lose much of its stake-holders.

Indonesia's democracy is unique in that we are not just a multi-party democracy, but we are also a multi-ethnic democracy. To preserve this multi-ethnic democracy, we need to foster the kind of democracy that is able to protect and nurture what is best about Indonesia: our cherished values of unity, harmony, and tolerance.

And thirdly, democracy must also be coupled with the factor of delivery.

When the people cast their ballot, they do so with the intention of improving their lives. That vote effectively becomes a deposit of trust, a token of confidence. Democracy must be a process of fulfillment of that hope.

It used to be said that the fastest and most effective way to achieve prosperity is through strong authoritarian rule. This is at least the adage of the 1970's, which drew from the lessons of Asia and Latin America, regions which were punctured with countries experiencing both authoritarian rule and high economic growth.

But as we crossed into the 21st century, and the new millennium, that is no longer true. Democracies can and do bring about stability, prosperity and progress. Democracies, with all its shortcomings and weaknesses and messiness, can transform a nation in ways that also its propels economic growth and social development.

I do not think it is a coincidence that countries that were part of the so-called "Third Wave of democracy", with few exceptions, also generally happen to be enjoying greater prosperity and progress today. It is also not a coincidence that democracies that become successful are usually those who are able to combine democracy with good governance.

In the final analysis, democratic transition is not a linear process where you go in the path of a straight line from A to Z. In many cases, it is a stop-go process rife with ups and downs, and shocks and jolts.

Every democratic transition is unique to its own circumstances, its own context, its own dynamic, as well as historical and cultural conditions.

Every democratic transition will require a process of adaptation and improvisation. This is what I have advised Senior General Than Shwe of Myanmar in my recent correspondence with him about Myanmar's roadmap to democracy.

And this is also what we in Indonesia must continue to do. To adapt. To shift our mindset. To reorder our priority. To embrace change gracefully and intelligently. To chart a new course for Indonesia.

Like elsewhere, Indonesia is now in the midst of a generational shift where hard questions are being asked about what do we want to be, where we want to go and how do we fit-in in the new globalize world.

I am delighted that we have among us here in this room many bright student leaders from various Universities in Indonesia. They are the ones who, not long from now, will have to guard and guide our young democracy.

And when they do, I trust that they will do so imbued with positive energy, not negative energy, with confidence, not cynicism and with an open healthy nationalism, not with narrow-minded ultra-nationalism.

This is the only way they can fulfill the hopes and aspirations of 220 Indonesians who will never stop yearning from a strong, stable and vibrant Indonesian democracy.

Excellencies Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Finally, by saying "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim", I have the great honor and pleasure to declare THE 40TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF IAPC open.

Thank you.

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