
WELCOME REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

Meeting of the Assembly of Parties

November 6, 2014

Rome, Italy

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. has held the Presidency of IDLO since March 2011, and I have had the honor of representing the United States at IDLO since July 2012. As you can see from the agenda, we will hold elections today and this will be my final meeting as president of the Assembly, so I want to take a moment to share a few thoughts about my close association with the International Development Law Organization over the past two-and-a-half years.

When I was preparing for my confirmation as American Ambassador to the UN Agencies in Rome, I was focused mostly on the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program. That was appropriate given the importance of figuring out how to feed 9 billion people by 2050 and the importance that the U.S. Government places on improving food and nutrition security around the world. But one of the great, pleasant surprises of this job has been my engagement with IDLO.

A STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATION

When I began my involvement with IDLO in 2012, the organization's primary focus was to stabilize itself after several difficult years. Working together, we effectively navigated that delicate period, building support and securing new contributions to create a strengthened organization. IDLO is widely recognized as a success story with a positive trajectory. Under the leadership of Director-General Khan, IDLO has more resources and better staff than ever before. It is working in more places than ever before and has new offices in both Geneva and The Hague, the latter thanks to a generous contribution by the Dutch government.

THE RULE OF LAW

Part of the reason that IDLO is thriving is because of the importance of its mission. IDLO's unique mandate to promote sustainable development through the rule of law places the Organization at the center of a range of pressing development challenges and opportunities for progress. It's hard to think of an item in the news that doesn't have a connection to the work that IDLO does, from the health crises that dominate the news cycle to the many conflicts and natural disasters around the world. Whether we are talking about creating new medicines and ensuring equal access to them, facilitating free and fair elections – and abiding by their outcomes – fighting discrimination, or building inclusive institutions that are available to everyone, the rule of law is essential for creating the infrastructure for safe, equitable, and accessible development.

TIMING

Over the next 10 months, the development community will focus increasingly on the post-2015 development agenda. Tremendous strides have been made since launching the Millennium Development Goals and we have some laudable successes, such as significant progress in the fight

against HIV & AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis and a dramatic decrease in the number of people living in extreme poverty. And while we still have a long way to go, we also have greater knowledge and more tools about how to get there. We've learned a lot.

One of the things that we've learned is that good governance and the rule of law are critical to truly sustainable development. As President Obama recently said, the issue of governance is critical:

“Regardless of the resources a country possesses, regardless of how talented the people are, if you do not have a basic system of rule of law, of respect for civil rights and human rights, if you do not give people a credible, legitimate way to work through the political process to express their aspirations, if you don't respect basic freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, if there are not laws in place in which everybody is equal under the law so that there's not one set of rules for the well-connected and another set of rules for ordinary people, if you do not have an economic system that is transparent and accountable so that people trust that if they work hard they will be rewarded for their work and corruption is rooted out – if you don't have those basic mechanisms, it is very rare for a country to succeed. I will go further than that: That country will not succeed over the long term.”

It remains to be seen whether rule of law will be included as its own pillar in the post-2015 development agenda, but I'm certain that it will be reflected and incorporated as a theme throughout the final agreement. IDLO and DG Khan have been intimately involved in those discussions, and is a forceful leader, so I think she'll succeed in ensuring that the rule of law gets the recognition it deserves.

U.S. COMMITMENT

The United States has been a proud member of IDLO since its founding because we recognize the centrality of the rule of law in creating just societies and sustainable development. We are currently the largest programmatic funder of IDLO's work in the field. Some of IDLO's flagship programs are in Afghanistan, and I am honored to say that several of those are funded by the U.S. State Department. Just a few months ago, IDLO and the State Department signed a new \$14.5 million agreement for a program called Supporting Access to Justice in Afghanistan. The program will build on the work of IDLO and other organizations to ensure that all members of Afghan society, but especially girls and women, are not only aware of their rights, but have access to the levers and protections of justice. The program will expand the number of units focused on Elimination of Violence Against Women from 8 to 19 and train staff at other women's protective shelters in conjunction with the Afghan Shelter Network. That program is just one of many that the U.S. Government funds and just one of dozens that IDLO is executing around the world.

Our State Department chose IDLO to execute this program because of the Organization's unique and sustained experience in the field and consistent record of providing top quality programs and results. IDLO was the right partner for this and many other programs, and you will hear today that many other countries and donors are finding the same to be true. They are also choosing to implement programs through IDLO in a variety of countries on a broad range of topics, because they are confident that IDLO can deliver results. If you already know IDLO, you will be pleased with today's report. And, if you are still learning about the Organization, I think you'll be impressed with the breadth and impact of IDLO's work.

CLOSING

After the election this afternoon, the United States will no longer be serving in the capacity of President of the Assembly. But that doesn't mean that we will not be involved. We will remain engaged and support IDLO programmatically and institutionally.

I encourage everyone here today to listen to the speeches and discussions, to consider the impact of IDLO's work on the ground, to recognize the remarkable turnaround the Organization has gone through, and to think about how your country can contribute to IDLO's important mission. There are many opportunities for member states to support the further development and strengthening of this revitalized organization. I encourage all member parties and observers here to get involved with IDLO, commit resources – institutional, financial, or political – and support the important work of creating a culture of justice in the world. Whether your government's foreign policy and development priorities emphasize women and gender issues, transparency and good governance, the environment, farming, or high technology, IDLO is working to support those broader policy aims. We are no longer asking for contributions to keep IDLO stable. We are now able to recommend – enthusiastically – that you invest in its success.

Thank you.

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) enables governments and empowers people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity.