THEMATIC SESSION I

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Chairs:

H.E. Labeed Abbawi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Iraq

Prof Iyad Barghouthi, General Director Ramallah Human Rights Center, Palestine

Rapporteur:

H.E. Amb. Ahmed Al-Wahishi, BMENA, DAD Coordinator, Head of Foreign Minister’s Bureau, Yemen

Thematic Session I of the Conference on Democracy, Political Reform and Freedom of Expression meeting in Sana’a on 25 June 2006,

The participants

Recall and reaffirm the commitments contained in the Sana’a Declaration of January 2004.

Reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the implementation of all recommendations of the Venice DAD Workshop of July 2005 as well as those adopted jointly by Governments and non-State actors at the Rabat International Colloquium on Political Pluralism and Electoral Processes of October 2005;

Recognizing the many initiatives, proposals and activities within the Region which underscore the values of democracy, equality, civil and political liberties as inalienable and inviolable basic human rights,
Reaffirming that these values are essential to the rise of true representative and multi-party systems, in which the rights and the role of the opposition and its peaceful activities are safeguarded;

Recalling that the right to freedom of expression and association, including the right to form and join political parties and trade unions, provides the necessary guarantees to safeguard the freedom of thought and the right of political parties and civil society organisations to hold opinions without interference and allows the participation of all citizens in political life and public affairs,

Affirming that the legitimacy and recognition of institutions depends on the sovereign right of the people to democratically elect their representatives,

Stressing that the reinforcement of civil societies is an essential element if there is to be balanced dialogue with institutions,

Recommend

Political Systems and Democratic Transformation

That parliaments of the Region engage in a process of dialogue with their counterparts to reinforce their skills and capacities;

That institutional reforms be accompanied by reforms of administrative structures, including increasing the professionalism of the public servants and the accountability towards the citizens;

That Regional countries shall develop with NGOs their own systems to evaluate progress on reform in the Region, finding operative techniques to assess and evaluate what has been done in each country;
That participants call upon the Arab League to review the proposed draft Arab Charter for Human Rights with a view to promote its acceptance by Arab counties (governments and civil society actors).

**Democracy and the Rule of Law**

That international law and national legislation safeguarding the independence of the courts be respected;

That terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, be regarded here as a serious threat to the growth and to the development of democracy, and world peace. Acts of terror create an atmosphere of distrust, panic and fear which undermine universally cherished values such as the freedom of thought and the freedom of expression; to combat terrorism requires addressing also its root causes;

**The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Processes**

That priority be given to the promotion of democratic values within the three branches of state (i.e. the legislative, judicial and executive authorities) to ensure fair and democratic practices in compliance with the rule of law, deemed essential to accelerate the process of political reforms and to guarantee progress in the protection of human rights as well as to foster the transparency and accountability of institutions;

That necessary measures be taken to promote the values of peace and tolerance through cross-cultural dialogue;
That the role of youth in the dialogue between civil society and government be strengthened and that, to this end, measures be taken to increase youth participation in good governance; that media and cultural exchange and school curricula be encouraged to contain principles of democracy and democratic values;

Endorses the many civil society networks in the Region and recommends that they be strengthened and built assume their role as a strong partner in the democratic reform process in the region;

*And in conclusion*, as it is at the national level that commitments taken at the Regional level need to be implemented in order to be effective, *the participants welcome* the willingness of the Government of Italy and No Peace Without Justice to follow up on the commitments which resulted from the first year of DAD activities on political pluralism enshrined in the Venice Workshop and Rabat Colloquium declarations.