REPORT OF THEMATIC SESSION I

“STANDARDS, STATUS AND ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES”
THEMATIC SESSION I: STANDARDS, STATUS AND ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Noting that political parties are an essential component of a pluralistic democracy and fundamental partners in the building-up of States based on the rule of law, participants emphasised that political development largely depends upon national dialogue and the existence of independent, dynamic, reliable and democratic parties that enjoy appropriate guarantees protected by the law. An independent judiciary is necessary to ensure the active participation of political parties in public life.

Internal ethical codes for political parties were also suggested. Participants stressed the need for greater and more active participation of women in the life of political parties and in electoral processes, including the possibility of substantial quotas.

Participants agreed that the conditions in which the political parties practice their activities require today for them to have at their disposal substantial resources in order to develop their visibility and to attract political support for their programmes. The participants emphasised the importance of the adoption of rules regulating the financing of political parties and of electoral campaigns.

In that respect, the participants encourage States to promote citizens’ participation in political parties’ activities, including through financial support to the latter. Therefore, States are invited to give favourable consideration to providing or increasing public financial support to their national political parties. Such a financial contribution from the State should take into consideration the electoral results for each party, from which derives the importance of establishing fair criteria for the distribution of State funds among national political parties.

Parallel to public financing, private contributions – particularly donations – can be an important source of funds for political parties. However, in order not to open the door to special interest groups or some form of corruption, this source of funds should be strictly regulated, while implementing the conditions for total transparency of the accounts, controlled by an independent audit organisation and with appropriate sanctions in case of violation of those rules.

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Given the above, the participants in Thematic Session I on “Standards, status and role of political parties” concluded that:

1. The development of political pluralism widely depends upon the existence of independent, dynamic and reliable political parties that are given appropriate guarantees protected by the law;

2. The promotion of political pluralism requires encouraging citizens’ participation in political parties’ activities, within the framework of a modern legal system regulating their activities;

3. States are invited to give favourable consideration to providing or increasing public financial support to national political parties and to encourage private contributions, in particular donations and membership fees;

4. Impeded access to the media, especially television, was also considered to be a crucial obstacle for the effective life and work of a political party. Governments are therefore encouraged to open public media to political parties in an equitable manner;

5. Major collaboration at the regional level is needed, as well as enhanced, international assistance in training both party members and elected parliamentarians, and staff to assist them in their daily activities. The need for greater and more comprehensive collaboration between the existing political groups was also emphasised;

6. The need to facilitate, as well as to give concrete support to the efforts for sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practices was also unanimously stressed. The partnership between the G8 and the broader Middle East and North Africa as well as the European Union, the League of Arab States and other partner countries should be aimed at encouraging positive and constructive participation of all political groups in public life;

7. The need for greater and more active participation of women in political parties and in electoral processes from the current status within a reasonable timeframe.