



**THE VIENNA DECLARATION
ON BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT
UN Headquarters, Vienna
26 – 29 June 2007**

PREAMBLE:

1. The 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, organized by the United Nations with the support of the Government of Austria and the Institutional Partners Group (IPG), brought together ministers, senior government officials, mayors, civil society organizations, and representatives from the private sector, academia and international organizations to exchange good practices, innovations, and strategies that improve governance and build trust in government. During the Forum, distinguished speakers and panelists presented their experiences and perspectives during seven plenary sessions and seven capacity development workshops. Six special meetings of parliamentarians, mayors, directors of public administration institutes, election commissioners, and public administration networks were further held the day prior to the Forum. In preparation, eight Regional Forums on Reinventing Government were also held from January 2006 to May 2007, the conclusions and recommendations of which were presented in the 7th Global Forum.

2. We, the participants of the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, held in Vienna, Austria, from 26 to 29 June 2007 on the theme of “Building Trust in Government,” convey our gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the successful preparation of the Forum by the United Nations Secretariat. We appreciate the contribution and hospitality of the Government of Austria. We are also grateful to the Governments of France, Italy and the Republic of Korea for their support in the organization of the Forum. We further reiterate our deepest appreciation to members of the Institutional Partner Group for their organization of the capacity development workshops.

3. Today, building trust in government is a worldwide concern. When people do not see themselves and their interests represented by their political leaders and their government, trust is compromised and the general public interest is undermined. When citizens’ expectations are not satisfied with how the state operates and what it delivers, a dissonance may result which can be heightened in the context of globalization. This leads to distrust and apathy.

4. Acknowledging the outcomes of the eight preparatory Regional Forums on Reinventing Government, we recognize that there is no one single recipe to build trust in government. Instead, a comprehensive approach needs to be adopted. While the principles of democratic governance such as transparency, accountability and citizens’ engagement are universal, there are different ways of accomplishing them.

5. Cognizant of the fact that women constitute more than 50% of the population and recognizing the critical role that they play in all spheres of life, we urge that women’s concerns be central in the overall implementation of the recommendations contained in this Declaration.

6. Therefore, we, the participants of the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, draw attention to this Declaration. The text of this declaration has not been negotiated with all participants and thus does not have any legal standing or generate political commitment on the part of the participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WAYS TO BUILD TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

- 1) **Secure Legitimacy of Government** – To strengthen the confidence of citizens in their governments, the state must be and be seen to be legitimate, fair and institutionally strong. Legitimacy derives from the respect and adherence to fundamental human rights and the constitution, including the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches of government and the independence of the judiciary. Elections confer and sustain political legitimacy when they symbolize and reflect the overall choice of the people. Therefore, we agree that governments must continue their efforts to implement free, fair and regular elections. The rule of law must be observed and safeguarded. We stress the importance of a constructive relationship between parliament and the executive for the building of trust. However, legitimacy also derives from a shared understanding of the role and functions of the state, and the respective roles of different socio-economic actors.
- 2) **Prioritize Service Delivery and Access** – Public sector performance creates trust in government by delivering “public value” via reliable public services that not only address market failures, but produce value by creating equity, equality and social capital. Trust in government depends in part upon the degree to which governments can ensure that citizens receive consistent and responsive access to the basic services upon which they depend. Locally provided services often constitute the first contact that citizens have with government processes. This influences not only citizens’ view of the responsiveness of government, but also their perceptions of the value of local participation in the governing of their communities. We therefore recommend that governments make it a priority to improve service access and delivery. This is particularly important to marginalised groups. Moreover, we recommend that public services adopt a customer service focus, aimed at improving the responsiveness and the quality of public services. Citizen feedback and active participation should be incorporated into governance processes.
- 3) **Increase Transparency and Accountability to Combat Corruption** – We recognize that corruption is one of the greatest challenges facing the world. Corruption involving officials from the private and public sectors is a grave and corrosive abuse of power. In order for citizens to have confidence in government, civil servants, elected officials and other stakeholders must conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards and in compliance with the law. We therefore recommend strict adherence to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), in addition to the adoption and implementation of national legislative and administrative measures. We further recommend strengthening the transparency of policy processes, ensuring the right to information, improving enforcement mechanisms, increasing public awareness and strengthening anti-corruption institutions. We also recommend an active role of civil society organizations in policy assessment and anti-corruption initiatives.
- 4) **Improve Access to ICTs** – E-government has tremendous potential to improve transparency, foster greater citizen engagement and participation in the policy process, and improve the quality of policy decisions and their implementation. Moreover, effective knowledge management can help to improve public service capacities, by enabling better coordination with the public sector and between governmental agencies, improving efficiency, permitting improvements in service delivery, enabling better response time to citizens, and strengthening the effectiveness of e-government initiatives. In the face of rapidly changing technological developments, there is a serious risk of a digital divide, both within and between countries. We encourage the support of the international donor community for programmes which improve the access of developing countries to ICT-related infrastructure, education, and training. We further stress that governments must take a leadership role in protecting data security and safeguarding privacy, through example and by regulation, to improve trust in the online environment.

- 5) **Support Effective Civil Society Engagement** - Civil society must be empowered to participate as a full partner in governance in order for trust to thrive in government institutions. Meaningful dialogue and regular face-to-face involvement in civil society organizations are the most direct and effective ways of building trust and trusting communities. Civil society promotes trust in government, because it presents itself as a field of constant interaction between state and society. Governments should allow sufficient political space for civil society to play its role and thereby help build social and political trust. We recommend the modernization of legislation governing civil society activities, increased participation of women in economic activities and political decision-making, greater public involvement in the planning and management of public sector activities, and encourage open dialogue and communication.
- 6) **Engage the Constructive Interest of a Free Media** – Because a vital part of maintaining trust depends on public perceptions, true or false, the role of the media in creating these perceptions has greatly increased with the information revolution. Governments have responded by devoting more resources and ministerial time in relating to the media. But in many situations much more could and should be done to draw the positive attention of the media on what works. Securing legitimacy requires the existence of a free and responsible media to enable greater participation in policy solutions by all citizens.
- 7) **Bring Government Closer to People** – Local governance is one of the most effective ways of bridging the gaps between citizens, political representatives, and public administrators. By ensuring that policy processes are informed by and in touch with the citizens, decentralization helps to anchor democratic governance by strengthening the legitimacy of the state, the notion of citizenship, citizen empowerment, and public service. We therefore re-emphasize the need to recognize sub-national levels of government as the closest public authority to people and to empower them to function as effective conduits between people and government. To bring government closer to people, we recommend the strengthening of regional and local governments by transferring powers and resources, deconcentrating administration, developing methods of local accountability, and institutionalizing local participatory processes.
- 8) **Enable Public-Private Partnerships** – Effective public-private partnerships can improve the design and implementation of development programmes by capitalizing on the respective strengths and resources of each partner. To ensure that these work to strengthen trust, comprehensive governance agreements are needed which detail the priorities and responsibilities of each partner, while acknowledging social costs and benefits. We agree that public-private partnerships must be subject to expert public oversight.
- 9) **Promote Innovations in Public Sector Reform** – We recognize that the ability of governments to earn the trust of their populations depends on the degree to which they are able to strengthen state capacities. That means, for example, strengthening the accountability for results by guaranteeing adequate competencies for both raising and allocating revenues. To facilitate this process, we recommend that governments employ incentive-based strategies which reward public sector employees who successfully introduce innovations that improve public service. Innovation should focus on enhancing public value. We further stress the importance of leadership for instilling public sector ethics, ensuring full participation of women in senior public sector positions, reinforcing shared values, and motivating staff. Human resource management and training is a critical factor in strengthening state capacities.
- 10) **Rebuild Trust in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries** – The interplay of social and political trust is even more crucial for crisis and post-conflict countries. Post-conflict societies are characterized by sweeping policy changes and an intensive institution-building process. Legal

frameworks must be reformed, former combatants rehabilitated and civic education promoted. It is evident that women's contribution to community development is particularly important in these circumstances. Therefore, social and legal barriers to women's participation must be removed. This is also important for people with disabilities. Security sector reform, justice and reconciliation, constitution making, and conflict prevention through redistributive justice need to occur simultaneously and in harmony with one another. While setting up new institutions is extremely demanding, it is even more difficult for them to achieve legitimacy and to function effectively. Within this context, we emphasize that international assistance organizations should tailor their support to the specific needs of each post-conflict country. Support should be granted at each stage of the transition process and should involve all key stakeholders.

FOLLOW-UP MEASURES

1. We urge international development partners, including bilateral donors and the United Nations, to increase support to developing countries to strengthen their capacity in public administration and governance.
2. We also urge concrete follow-up to the 7th Global Forum. In particular, we recommend, *inter alia*, that the following measures be taken:
 - a. support a global network of innovators to share ideas and experiences, and act as an observatory;
 - b. support regional and global level governance centers to document and share good ideas;
 - c. support regional forums to formulate regional cooperation strategies to improve public administration and governance;
 - d. promote North-South and South-South cooperation and dialogue;
 - e. encourage country anchored pilot projects to test alternative methodologies and approaches to promote and strengthen effective and democratic governance;
 - f. focus at least one category of the UN Public Service Award on projects which contribute to strengthening citizen's trust in government; and
 - g. commission concept papers to develop a framework of principles to underpin trust in government.
3. In addition and in parallel to the global network of innovators, we also urge organization of ministerial round tables to meet periodically to review their experiences in dealing with selected issues of trust, and make recommendations. We also recommend similar meetings at regional and national levels for local administrators. Finally, round tables of parliamentarians are also recommended to share innovative practices and institutional designs.