

9 September 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Launch of Interpeace's Constitution-Making Handbook**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For French-speakers, constitutions are famous because they give root to the longest word of the French language, the 25-letter adverb: 'anticonstitutionnellement'. Therefore, most of the time, it is as kids, by going through the Guinness book of records that we get to know that such a thing as a constitution exists. This happens long before we are mature enough to fully understand how important our country's constitution and its content are for our daily lives. Constitutions are indeed the backbone of democratic life.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly pleased to be with you today for the launch of this Handbook. I thank Interpeace and its Director for inviting me to this event. I would like to join you, Mr. Director, in commending the authors, as well as your sponsors and all the partners of Interpeace who contributed to this great project.

When I was member of the Swiss Parliament, I chaired the parliamentary committee which was tasked to reviewing the Swiss Federal Constitution. It took us one year, from 1997 to 1998, to conduct the review; this in a country with well-functioning institutions and well-trained politicians. This gives an idea of the challenge that constitution-making can be in countries emerging from conflicts or revolutions.

There could not be a better time for the publication of this Handbook. With the Arab spring which blew the wind of reform over North Africa, Tunisia, Egypt, and now also Libya need to adopt new constitutions. Not to mention the many other regions of the world that are facing the same challenge of constitution-making for consolidating democracy.

This Handbook will soon be a bestseller, and rightly so. It fills an important gap. It goes a step beyond offering guidance on what needs to be in a constitution. It adopts a very innovative approach and focuses on the process of making a constitution. This is an issue of crucial importance for peace and state-building.

Thanks to a great number of examples and case studies, thanks to its very detailed and practically-oriented structure, the Handbook offers precious guidance on designing, implementing and supporting constitution-making processes. The Handbook makes clear that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach as regards the content of a constitution, but that there are, as regards the making of a constitution, basic principles such as local ownership and inclusiveness which are crucial for success.

This Handbook is the result of a thorough investigation conducted over three years with a great number of practitioners and academics from all over the world. Let me again commend all those involved in this project for their impressive work. I am convinced that this Handbook will rapidly establish itself as a major tool to consolidate peace and democracy. Thank you, all, for contributing to making the great values of the United Nations becoming reality.