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I am both honored and pleased to share with you the *Practical Guide on Democratic Dialogue*, which represents a joint effort by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the OAS General Secretariat. This document has some history behind it. In 2003, International IDEA, the UNDP, the OAS, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and a broad group of dialogue practitioners came together to create a methodological tool that would facilitate the work of institutions and practitioners in the design and implementation of dialogue processes. This led to the publication, in 2007, of *Democratic Dialogue – A handbook for practitioners*. That document has become a valuable reference for the practice of dialogue, both in this Hemisphere and around the world. It has been translated in to English, French and Arabic.

Almost six years after the *Handbook's* publication, and after it had been used in numerous dialogue processes in the region, the OAS and the UNDP decided to work together to update and adapt its concepts and tools in a simple and concise way in line with the new dynamics of conflict in the Americas. As you will see in the publication itself, the *Guide* contains four chapters: the first offers an overview of current conflict dynamics in the region and, on the basis of that situation, the second chapter offers guidelines and basic principles for an authentic democratic dialogue. The third section examines each of the stages in a dialogue process. Finally, chapter four provides the reader with a practical toolbox, which can be used in the different stages of the process.

One problem in discussing “dialogue” is that the word has been overused, and it has been to describe processes that are not really dialogues. What we should ask ourselves is the following: What is dialogue really, and what makes it different from other ways of tackling conflicts, such as negotiation? In light of that, I would like to quote de definition of dialogue given in the guide:

*Dialogue is a process of **genuine interaction** in which **human beings listen** deeply and respectfully to each other in a way that what they learn changes them. Each participant in a dialogue strives to incorporate the concerns of the other participants into their own perspective, even when they continue to disagree. No participant gives up his or her identity, but each recognizes the human value of the claims of the others and therefore acts different towards others.*

When speaking specifically of **democratic dialogue**, we mean a dialogue that respects and strengthens the democratic institutional framework and seeks to transform relations of conflict, thereby avoiding crises and violence and, consequently, contributing to democratic governance.

I would like to use these few minutes to showcase the seven guiding principles that the *Guide* enshrines:

First, dialogue must be an inclusive process, involving all the players affected by a particular problem, including those groups that have traditionally been marginalized.

Next, in order for change to be sustainable, the participants in the process must have a sense of joint ownership; in other words, a feeling that the process and its results belong to the dialogue participants and not to external facilitators such as, for example, the OAS or the UN.

Third, dialogue fosters an attitude of learning, in which others are listened to with openness, their opinions and viewpoints are considered and their ideas are respected. Another characteristic of genuine dialogue is that it is a human process, in other words, it encourages empathy towards others.

The fifth principle is important; it holds that in all dialogue processes **confidentiality** must be respected. Dialogue must also take into account and emphasize a long-term perspective; in other words, a search for sustainable and lasting solution. Thus, dialogue processes seek to address the root causes of conflicts and not merely their immediate triggers.

Finally, dialogue is a process in which the parties involved act in good faith, without hidden intentions or agendas that could hinder the process or affect the building of confidence in it.

You will have noticed that several of these principles are the same as those contained in the *United Nations Guidelines for Effective Mediation*, and that is no coincidence. In fact, dialogue is not a dispute resolution procedure like those set out in the Charters of the OAS and of the UN.

Instead, it is an approach or way to address problems and to connect with others, and it can be applied to all kinds of peaceful dispute resolution processes, including the high-level negotiations that our organizations are called on to support.

Thus, as facilitators or mediators, or in good offices proceedings, our role is to promote these principles, while remaining aware that they do not offer a magic solution or the only way for dealing with conflicts.

The Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions, which I currently led, has had the opportunity of supporting several processes with a dialogue approach.

One of those experiences involved a series of meetings between demobilized women and women victims of the armed conflict, held in César department, Colombia, as a part of the “We Are All Women” project.

During this process, with the support of the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, groups of demobilized women and women victims met separately over a period of three months until one day they began to gather in the same room to engage in a dialogue, with the impartial presence of the MAPP officials.

During one of those meetings, a member of the demobilized group – a woman named Esperanza, who had joined the paramilitaries after leaving her husband

because of domestic violence – presented the victims of violence with a bouquet of roses. Remembering the experience, Esperanza said:

*“I felt at peace with myself, I felt calm, I could rest. I could truly ask for forgiveness for the harm I had caused”*

Those words show the power of dialogue to promote reconciliation in this case. And so, capacity-building in dialogue for the construction of peace is one of the most strategic contributions that the OAS and the UN can offer in the Hemisphere.

We hope that the *Guidelines for Effective Mediation* and the *Practical Guide on Democratic Dialogue* will help, in some way, to resolve some of the region’s conflicts. I therefore invite you to review and analyze the contents of these publications.