

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

IEC CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION OF THE GUEST SPEAKER

- **Director of Ceremonies**
- **Your Excellency President Thabo Mbeki**
- **Chairperson of The Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) and Members of the A- WEB Executive**
- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament**
- **Leaders of Political Parties**
- **Fellow IEC Commissioners, Management Team and Staff**
- **Members of The Diplomatic Corps**
- **Representatives of The United Nations Agencies and other Development Partners**
- **Representatives of The Continental Election Management Forums**
- **Representatives of the Election Management Bodies**
- **Representatives of Electoral Assistance Agencies**
- **Representatives of Civil Society Organisations**
- **Members of The Media**
- **Excellencies**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It renders me a tremendous opportunity to welcome you on behalf of the Electoral Commission of South Africa to Cape Town and South Africa for the 5TH General Assembly International Conference.

As this event's theme suggests, this is not an ordinary jamboree of elections management bodies. We are gathered here out of the conviction that elections are not an end but a means to a developmental end.

It is axiomatic that development will remain a distant mirage if we do not thwart the alarming erosion of democratic gains characterised by the assault on Democratic institutions by the anti-democracy forces whether in new or established, small or big democracies.

In addition, elections will not contribute to democracy and development if such elections fall short of the minimum benchmarks for democratic elections. Hence, as election management bodies, we can no longer only focus on counting the number of registered voters and ballot papers. We must confront the daunting challenge of worldwide democratic reversals that impact the electoral processes, democracy and development.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, this Conference is not only a timely platform, but also epoch making being the first one on African Soil and in the city of Cape Town which has seen much of South Africa's own transition to democracy.

The Conference goal is to discuss, on the one hand, the ways of systematically proactively dealing with challenges of democratic recession to minimise the impact on the electoral processes. It will also seek ways to enhance the EMBs' leadership capacities, coordination, and planning skills required to withstand the challenges of democratic recession.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I take my seat, it is my singular honour to introduce to you someone who needs no introduction.

A Champion of South Africa's democratic transition in his own right, and the second President of a democratic South Africa,

A Central figure in African Renaissance and the transition of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU),

A Visionary, who during his tenure as Head of State and Government ensured that the dividends of South Africa's democracy were enjoyed continent-wide by enabling the state institutions including the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) to render technical support to their counterparts on the continent,

I am talking about a leader during whose term as president:

- ✓ The idea of developing a continental response to the democracy and governance challenges was conceived in Pretoria, South Africa in 2003 during an event hosted by the Electoral Commission of South Africa and the Association of African Electoral Authorities. This led to the development of the African Charter on Democracy,

Elections and Governance (ACDEG) adopted by the African Union in 2007, and which came into force in 2012.

- ✓ The Electoral Commission of South Africa provided much needed technical and peer support to the electoral management bodies of the Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, and Mauritania

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in welcoming His Excellency Mr Thabo Mbeki, the Former President of the Republic of South Africa to deliver the opening address to the Conference.

I thank you.