Democratic Transitions: Conversations with World Leaders

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Institutions, activists, political parties, students, women’s rights movements, and international actors all have important roles in situations where authoritarian regimes transition into democratic nations. Political leaders can also have an impact, even if they do not play crucial roles.

What has been the experience of political leaders during transition processes? What can we learn from them? What would the transitions have looked like without Mandela, de Klerk, Mbeki and Tambo in South Africa, or Aylwin and Lagos in Chile?

For the first time, the experiences of top political leaders from around the world who were in power during democratic transitions, have been gathered together. Democratic Transitions: Conversations with World Leaders, co-edited by Sergio Bitar and Abraham F. Lowenthal, and an initiative of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), is a valuable collection of knowledge and policy advice for future political leaders, civil society, and anyone who seeks to understand, contribute to, and support democratic transition processes.

A Chilean engineer, economist, and politician, Mr Bitar served as Chile’s minister of energy and mines in the cabinet of Salvador Allende. After the 1973 coup, he was a political prisoner for 14 months and then exiled. One of the architects of the “Coalition for the ‘No’” that defeated Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite, he later served as a Senator, as head of the Party for Democracy, and as a minister in the governments of presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet. Mr Bitar is president of Chile’s Foundation for Democracy and director of the Global Trends and Latin America’s Future project at the Inter-American Dialogue.