



Institute
for
Education

IFE/INFO Special Guest: Dr. Robert Hormats, Under Secretary of State

The Institute for Education kicked off its 21st season of our flagship INFO Public Policy roundtable program with a salon discussion venue, hosted by H.E. Dino Patti Djalal, at the Indonesian Embassy. Dr. Robert D. Hormats, the Under Secretary of State for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs was the special guest. Dr. Hormats had just returned from a tour of the Middle East and shared with the salon his thoughts on the status of the Arab Spring.

IFE Intern and University of California - Berkeley student Nick Gaines, opened the evening by talking about the website that he is launching, MyGovHub.org. Politics Gone Social GOVHUB will be a nonpartisan, web based citizen's forum that will provide a personalized platform for political engagement. GOVHUB will create for each of its users a personal page with links to information to every representative and issue that reaches his or her life. GOV HUB can be exported and adapted to every nation on earth. We believe it will revolutionize politics. The website's goal is to help to make politics and government more interactive and sustain engagement between elections. As Nick described it, this site will help to encourage "Democracy beyond the voting booth." The site will launch at the end of the month, in Berkeley.



Addressing the attendees, which included ambassadors from Japan, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, and Belgium, Dr. Hormats emphasized several themes that reflect the mission of the Institute for Education: the importance of communication, collaboration and engaging with different perspectives. Describing the origins of the Arab Spring, Dr. Hormats argued that, fundamentally, "People want a sense that they can participate in their governments. They don't want to be subjects; they want to be citizens. They want to have their voices heard."

Dr. Hormats spoke of the progress across the Middle East in moving towards more open and democratic societies by emphasizing that each country faces unique challenges and different paths, despite being driven by a common desire to participate in their governments. Whether looking at countries well into their revolutions like Tunisia or Egypt or countries making reforms without outright revolutions like Saudi Arabia or Morocco, Dr. Hormats described how these countries are looking to Indonesia, Turkey and Malaysia for models of how to have a modern, Islamic democracy.



Ambassador Djalal joined the conversation to share lessons from Indonesia. It is essential that these countries be able to "make mistakes," argued Ambassador Djalal. Further, they must "sprint" into democracy and make reforms quickly in order to establish and maintain democracy, modernity and Islam in one system and not revert back to old models of government.

Dr. Hormats outlined the limitations to US involvement given our economic and political realities at home, and shared ways in which the US can play a constructive role. By providing technical assistance and working to develop commerce and trade, the US and partner countries can help create economic stability, and in turn political stability.

Dr. Hormats ended the evening by discussing university students in Cairo trying to foster democracy by recounting his visit to Tahrir Square. Dr. Hormats compared his visit to the epicenter of Egyptian protests to the local Occupy DC protests. In Tahrir Square, he recalled seeing many young protestors wearing sweatshirts with the names of American universities. When he spoke with several, he heard no anti-American sentiments and, in fact, heard from several that they went to American schools like the University of Texas and simply wanted to bring back the same sense of opportunity to their home country. Hope remains strong.

By Nick Seaver, IFE Fellow

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