President Ramos, Foreign Minister Downer, Vice-Chancellor Terrell, Honourable Members and Senators, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Roland Rich, I am the Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions and I welcome you to our Inaugural Annual Address.

This is a particularly proud moment for the Centre. We are gathered in the Main Committee Room of Parliament House and sharing the platform with me today are four very important figures. Let me say a few words about each of them.

Professor Deane Terrell is the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, the home of the Centre for Democratic Institutions. It was the ANU, in conjunction with Murdoch University in Western Australia, which won the bid for CDI. In my view, there could be no better place to work.

As the major focus of the Centre’s activity is the Asia-Pacific region, the Centre is able to draw support from the academic body that has more expertise about this region than any other university in the world. This is a proposition that can be supported empirically in terms of numbers of academics. When it comes to opinion about the ANU’s quality, I am pleased to defer to the Times of London, which placed the ANU in a peer group with Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, MIT, Stanford and the Sorbonne.
he will have more to say about the qualities of the university.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was the inspiration behind the formation of the Centre for Democratic Institutions. It was at his insistence that the concepts of human rights and good governance found practical expression in Australian foreign and aid policies. This has been translated in various ways such as the human rights dialogue with China, but its most direct manifestation has come in the formation of CDI. It was Mr Downer who thought through the initiative, gave it its shape and found the resources to make it happen.

Mr Downer will be introducing our keynote speaker and I would also invite him to share with us his vision for CDI.

The worst sin one can commit in these circumstances is to invite your boss to introduce someone and then steal his thunder before he gets a chance to rise to the podium. I promise not to steal his thunder but I would ask his indulgence to get in a lightning bolt or two.

The role of CDI is to harness the best of Australia’s democratic experience to assist developing countries with their governance needs. We can only do that if we have a two-way flow of information and views. Australia has every reason to be proud of its institutions of government on which CDI draws. But we still need to listen to the voices of Asia.

When the Ambassador of the Philippines, HE Mrs Delia Domingo Albert who graces the stage, a veritable human dynamo devoted to her country’s interests, mentioned that President Ramos might be visiting Australia, I seized my chance.

There would not be a more appropriate voice to speak on democracy in Asia than President Fidel Ramos. As I well recall from my time serving at the Australian Embassy in Manila, the Philippines has an exuberantly free press that loves to employ popular sobriquets. President Ramos is known as “Steady Eddy”, a term often accompanied by a descriptor like “cigar-chomping” or “straight-shooting”. They are well chosen.

While most of us use words in support of democracy, President Ramos, then as Secretary of National Defense, defended democracy with weapon in hand and with his own life on the line. There would have been no happy ending to President Cory Aquino’s term without the straight shooting of Fidel Ramos.

I am therefore delighted that he accepted the Centre’s invitation to deliver this inaugural address. I am now left with the virtually insoluble problem of trying to find somebody of similar stature to deliver next year’s address.
To introduce our keynote speaker, I call on the Hon Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs.