

Final Report of the Community of Democracies Non-Governmental Forum

Seoul, November 12, 2002

The Second Community of Democracies Non-Governmental Forum met at a time of growing challenges to democracy in the world. The spread of international terrorism, and the disappointments of many citizens with the economic and political performance of their democratic governments, underscore both the imperative for democracy to provide good and effective governance, and the need for a broad range of institutional reforms and policy initiatives in order to deepen and improve democracy.

Members of the Non-Governmental Forum met in nine topical panels, which presented the following perspectives and recommendations.

Strengthening Political Party Systems

Political parties form the cornerstone of a democracy, performing such indispensable functions as representing and aggregating social interests and facilitating political participation. However, political parties are facing a crisis of public confidence due to their organizational and political shortcomings, including their lack of internal democracy and the widespread perception of corruption in party and campaign finance. Therefore, political party building and reform must become a central issue among the worldwide network of pro-democracy activists and elected leaders.

The topical panel on political party systems recommends:

- The Community of Democracies (and other global and regional conferences) should regularly engage political parties through political party international organizations.
- In their development assistance programs, bilateral and multilateral donors should provide increased support to strengthen political parties and party systems, particularly through programs that build professional capacity in political parties and promote more effective interaction between parties and civil society organizations.
- The Community of Democracies, in both its governmental and nongovernmental forms, and international donors and democracy networks should promote awareness of successful efforts at political party modernization and renewal.
- Democracies should confront the crisis in political parties and campaign finance and weigh alternative models for reform. The panel recommends public financing for political parties to promote fairness and transparency.

Local Government and Democracy

Democratic local governance provides an important means in bringing political power closer to the citizenry, to stimulate local economic development and alleviate poverty, to widen the participation of women and other marginalized groups, and to recruit and train new political leaders.

The topical panel on local government and democracy recommends the following initiatives for strengthening democratic local governance:

- Democracies should grant local governments constitutionally enshrined powers and the requisite financial and administrative resources to respond to the needs of their communities.
- Democracies should draw boundaries of local government authorities so that they have sufficient scale to be financially and administratively viable.
- Democracies and international donors should provide adequate training for local government officials, both elected and administrative, to ensure their capacity to govern effectively.

Gender and Democracy

Obstacles to women's full participation in political and economic life present some of the greatest challenges to the achievement and legitimation of full democracy. Gender issues should be a concern for anyone committed to the improvement and consolidation of democracy. Therefore, concerns to enhance the effective participation of women should be reflected in all dimensions of democratic development.

The topical panel on gender and democracy recommends:

- Democratic systems, and political parties, should adopt concrete measures to encourage and increase the political participation of women in all levels of government.
- Democratic legislatures and executive agencies should adopt new policy measures to eliminate discrimination against women in government programs, increase women's access to employment, and eliminate violence against women.
- Democracies should consider how new policies will affect women, and periodically provide data to assess these policy impacts.
- Democratic donors, governments, and NGOs should include gender issues in civic education programs at all levels.

- Member governments of the Community of Democracies should endeavor to ensure women’s participation on official government delegations to these meetings.

Corruption and Democracy

No problem more threatens the efficacy and legitimacy of democracy than corruption. Survey data from a wide range of democracies, new and old, shows growing public disaffection with democratic institutions as a result of perceptions that corruption is growing significantly and that governments are not taking effective measures to control it. Institutional reforms to reduce corruption represent one of the most important challenges both for democratic governments and for international democratic organizations and communities. Civil society—including free and independent media—has a critical role to play in combating corruption, and democratic governments should view these actors as allies in the struggle for reform.

The topical panel on Corruption and Democracy recommends:

- Member states of the Community of Democracies should actively support the monitoring and enforcement of international conventions against corruption, such as the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Public Officials, the proposed UN convention against corruption, as well as regional conventions. They should also provide adequate funding to enable OECD’s Working Group on Bribery to review and monitor vigorously enforcement of the Convention in signatory countries.
- Multilateral and bilateral donors should, in allocating development assistance, granting trade preferences, and providing debt relief, give preference to countries that are democracies (or clearly on that path) *and* that demonstrate a strong commitment to fighting corruption and improving governance.
- In judging the extent to which states are honoring principles of democracy, human rights, and good governance, donors should consult regularly with competent civil society actors in recipient or potential recipient countries.
- Member states of the CD should reform international banking laws to promote greater transparency, to identify funds derived from corrupt practices, and to facilitate the recovery of stolen state assets.
- Member states of the CD should provide greater public access to information on such matters as government budgeting, finance, and procurement, party and campaign finance, and the assets declarations of public officials.

Market and Democratic Governance

It is a great moral tragedy that over a billion people live on less than two dollars a day. The disparities in incomes across countries have increased tremendously. In the 19th century the richest country was only about twenty times richer than the poorest one. Today Luxembourg has a per capita income of US\$42,000 compared to US\$440 in Sierra Leone, a difference of a hundred times.

The comparative experience with economic growth over the last few decades has taught us some crucial lessons about the relationship between democracy and economic growth. One of these is the importance of private initiative and the institutional underpinnings of market economies. These institutions include a system of property rights, a market-oriented regulatory apparatus curbing fraud and anti-competitive behavior, and the rule of law and clean government.

The topical panel on Market and Democratic Governance recommends:

- To strengthen markets and improve democratic governance, the Community of Democracies should add property rights to the Warsaw Declaration list of democratic rights.
- To build a middle class supportive of democratic development, democratic governments should reduce the costs of entry into the economy for entrepreneurs, the informal sector, and especially the poor, by simplifying business registration, licensing, and tax procedures.
- To build public-private partnerships, the Community of Democracies should increase business association and labor union participation in democracy promotion programs.
- To make the economic reform process more democratic, governments, including donors, should widen public participation by increasing disclosure of draft regulations and legislation and adopting freedom of information laws.
- Democracies should adopt and strengthen independent regulatory and economic institutions. To develop the necessary public support and local capacity for such institutions, donor countries should support local policy institutions or think tanks.

Media and Democracy

Press freedom and the free flow of information are universal values that should be vigorously respected by all governments. A free and responsible press is a crucial bulwark against corruption and the abuse of power, and therefore an important element in restoring public confidence in democratic institutions.

- The Community of Democracies should convene at the upcoming UNESCO meeting to develop a common position to safeguard media freedom.
- All governments should enact freedom of information laws that give citizens and media widespread access to government information.
- Governments should distribute broadcast frequencies by a transparent process, governed by autonomous entities that reflect the diversity of society.
- Any government restriction on freedom of the media in the name of national security concerns should be narrowly drawn and interpreted and subject to public scrutiny and debate.
- Governments should not restrict access to the Internet or seek to control its content.

Education for Democracy

A high quality democracy, with broad participation and legitimacy, depends on an informed citizenry that values and understands democracy. Civic education programs of all kinds are vital for developing in citizens the knowledge, skills, and normative commitments to participate effectively in democratic governance.

The topical panel on Education for Democracy recommends the following, and has established a Steering Committee of the Democracy Education NGO Forum to assist with the process:

- In line with the Warsaw Declaration's endorsement of democracy education, and its recognition of the necessity of collaboration between governments and NGOs in this regard, the governments of the Convening Group should, *within six months*, convene a meeting of representatives of their governments, other governments, together with an equal number of representatives of national and international NGOs, and multilateral institutions – such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and regional bodies – to develop a strategy for promoting democracy education world wide.
- Democratic governments should take steps to institutionalize democracy education in primary and secondary schools in partnership with NGOs.
- The Community of Democracies should lobby fellow members of the UN, and enlist the support of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to declare the years 2005 to 2014 the Decade of Democracy Education.
- Democratic governments should implement taxation regimes and funding arrangements that encourage non-profit NGOs to provide democracy education.

Freedom of Association and the Protection of NGOs

Despite some isolated local exceptions and higher visibility of labor standards and NGOs, world conditions are generally growing worse for labor unions and NGOs. Restrictive new laws are being passed, the search for foreign investment is driving labor standards down, significant setbacks of democratic institutions are taking place, and many extremely authoritarian governments show no signs of change.

The “war on terrorism” after September 11, 2001 is being used by governments to crack down on trade unions and NGO activities in the name of security; however often this repression is fueled less by security concerns and is an attempt to use security as an excuse to curtail and limit the power of trade unions and NGOs. Governments throughout the world are using draconian internal security regulations (often counter to protections of rights in their own constitutions) to harass and detain labor and NGO activists. Some of the effects of economic globalization are being used by governments and corporations to impact on issues raised by unions and NGOs, which have the effect of trying to shrink the space and role of unions and NGOs in civil society. This includes labor, environmental and consumer issues among others.

The topical panel on Freedom of Association and the Protection of NGOs recommends:

- Democracies should provide a positive “legal enabling environment” which respects the fundamental rights of freedom of association, the right to organize and collectively bargain, and freedom of expression. This environment should be grounded in these countries’ commitments to the UN Human Rights Charter and the core labor conventions of the International Labor Organization. Democracies should utilize more directly and effectively those UN agencies that protect labor and other human rights. Governments are also called upon to acknowledge and support efforts such as the World Bank’s survey to enable legal environments which better contribute to development.
- Civil society organizations should conduct a survey on the backlash against labor unions and NGOs as a result of the post 9/11 “war against terrorism.” This report would draw on the ICFTU annual report, ILO documents, and other sources of information about the state of freedom of association and expression. In addition, the NGO community should form initiative groups and use a self-regulatory mechanism to make transparent, proper assessments for itself.
- Countries aspiring to the label of “democratic” must release trade union and political activists who are detained and jailed for exercising their legitimate rights of freedom of association and expression. The panel appeals to President Kim Dae Jung, as leader of the host country of this conference, regarding the high level of trade union activists currently being detained. Korea should set an example for other democracies to follow.

- The use of internal security acts (often dating from the colonial period) by countries that call themselves democracies must be reviewed. The practice of arresting and detaining labor and human rights activists without due process or a fair trial, simply for exercising their freedoms of association and expression is not a democratic value and should come to an end.

Promoting Civil Society in Closed Societies

The governments of closed societies are not meant to be represented at the ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies. However, democracies have an obligation to support politically, diplomatically, and financially efforts by civil society activists in these countries struggling to promote political liberalization and ultimately democratization.

The topical panel on Promoting Civil Society in Closed Societies recommends:

- Democracies should ensure that all bilateral and multilateral assistance programs in closed societies should be provided through independent NGO's, and that aid be closely monitored to ensure proper implementation.
- Democracies should caucus at the U.N. and in other regional and international forums to elect other democracies to membership in the U.N. Human Rights Commission and other relevant bodies.
- Multilateral regional organizations should maintain universal democratic standards for membership, and those states that do not meet these standards should be denied membership in these multilateral institutions.
- Democratic states should demand that authoritarian regimes respect human rights and re-double their efforts to win the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.
- Members of the CD should use the caucus framework provided for in the Warsaw Declaration to create high-level teams to foster dialogue between authoritarian regimes and their democratic oppositions. CD members seek to promote human rights and democracy in a variety of areas, such as encouraging transparency, free media, etc.

Members of the NGO Forum extend their solidarity to those courageous democrats—Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, Oswaldo Paya of Cuba, Saad Eddin Ibrahim of Egypt, and Morgan Tsvangari of Zimbabwe—who were denied the rights to travel and were thus prevented by their governments from being with us at this international assembly to expand and strengthen democracy throughout the world. We stand with them and their peaceful struggle for democratic values and fundamental human rights. And in their name we extend our solidarity as well to all those who suffer under

dictatorial regimes, particularly those who live in the darkest and most isolated corners of the world. They are not alone. Through our common efforts, their countries will someday—soon we hope—join the Community of Democracies.

We also wish to extend our support to those people of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, and other authoritarian countries who have been detained, imprisoned or have disappeared because of their opinions and beliefs.

Attachment 1: Appeal to Governments

Attachment 2: Appeal to the President of Azerbaijan

Attachment 3: Appeal to the President of Belarus

Attachment 4: Appeal to the President of Kazakhstan

Attachment 5: Appeal to the President of Uzbekistan

Attachment 6: Appeal for the Release of Thich Quang Do, Detained for Launching an Appeal For Democracy in Vietnam

Attachment 7: Appeal to the CD Convening Group for the Attendance of the Taiwanese Minister to the CD Ministerial Conference