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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT EVENT HOSTED
BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND
ON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY
New York, 15 September 2008**

Professor Doyle, Chair of the Advisory Board of the United Nations Democracy Fund,
Ambassador Ripert, Permanent Representative of France and Member of the Advisory Board,
Ambassador Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan and Member of the Advisory Board,
Mr. Dossal, Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Partnerships,
Mr. Rich, Executive Head of the United Nations Democracy Fund,
Civil society partners in the work for democracy worldwide,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am moved to welcome you all and join you in celebration of this first International Day of Democracy. Allow me to congratulate the General Assembly on designating this Day, which commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Democracy by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1997.

When the IPU issued the Declaration 11 years ago as a comprehensive guide to Governments and Parliaments throughout the world, it established a milestone in the work for democracy promotion. Like the enduring and shining example of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more than 50 years earlier, it filled a gap in the normative architecture of our age. Today, we are well informed and supported by the Universal Declaration on Democracy when it comes to the basic principles of democracy, the elements and standards for the exercise of democratic government, and democracy's international dimension.

It is deeply significant that this Day was brought into being by countries which are themselves working hard every day to nurture and consolidate their young democratic foundations. When the International Conference of New and Restored Democracies, through its chair Qatar, put forward the General Assembly resolution proposing the Day, it sent a very powerful signal to the rest of the world. The International Conference, and the Community of Democracies, make up the two great families of democracies in the world. Both groups are cherished parts of the larger United Nations family.

I am proud to note that among those young democracies is my own country, Korea. The Republic of Korea underwent a long and difficult political transition to get there -- following years of emergency laws, of censorship, of political imprisonments. It was the will of the people

that brought us there, swept along on the tide of history -- and with full and strong support from the international community.

With our transition to a pluralist State came greater transparency and accountability, a more effective government machinery, and a thriving business sector able to compete with the rest of the world. I will forever be grateful to the international community and the United Nations for their support in helping to make it happen.

Today, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am determined to ensure that the UN works globally, wherever we can, to help people and nations everywhere build and strengthen democratic systems. This is not an uncomplicated endeavour for the United Nations. The word democracy, in fact, appears nowhere in our Charter.

But at the same time, we know that supporting democracy must form a core part of the UN's mission. We know this because experience has taught us, time and again, that democracy is essential to achieving our fundamental goals of peace, human rights and development. Consolidated democracies do not go to war against each other. Human rights and the rule of law are best protected in democratic societies. And development is much likelier to take hold if people are given a genuine say in their own governance, and a chance to share in the fruits of progress.

The United Nations Democracy Fund, created just over two years ago, is now strongly supported by some 35 donors among the UN's Member States. These cover a rich spectrum of countries, from Ireland to India, from Poland to Peru, and from France to Japan, whose Ambassadors honour us with their presence today.

The Democracy Fund focuses its energy on strengthening the voice of civil society in the democratic process. Its work now reaches more than 80 countries, covering a broad range of civil society efforts in every realm -- from media training in Sierra Leone to civic education in Vanuatu and strengthening women's political participation in Ecuador.

This focus recognizes a fundamental truth about democracy everywhere -- that it is ultimately the product of a strong, active and vocal civil society. It is such a civil society that fosters responsible citizenship and makes democratic forms of government work.

I am delighted that today, you will hear about efforts on the ground from the real heroes on the front lines of democracy -- the civil society champions themselves. May their stories inspire all the United Nations family in this historic mission.

Thank you very much.