

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE UN DEMOCRACY FUND

New York, 10 April 2007

I am delighted at this opportunity to address the Advisory Board of the UN Democracy Fund. It feels especially appropriate to welcome all of you one day after the landmark UN-facilitated presidential elections in Timor-Leste.

Let me first recognize Dr. Rima Khalaf-Hunaidi for her able chairing of this Advisory Board. Let me also thank the many UN Member States who have contributed to this new Fund.

Dear friends,

The Democracy Fund is a recent UN innovation. But our Organization's democracy agenda is longstanding. In nearly every part of the world, the UN assists Member States conduct elections and improve governance. We work to promote human rights and strengthen civil society. We help countries emerging from conflict build democratic institutions and entrench democratic norms.

Today, the UN's efforts to promote democracy are inseparable from our broader work for security, development and human rights. That is why the 2005 World Summit outcome document affirmed democracy as one of the "universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations". And it made a commitment to "strengthening countries' capacities to implement the principles and practices of democracy."

The Democracy Fund is a creative and flexible forum to advance these aims. In a relatively short period, it has become a hub for the UN's democracy agenda. Its programmes support a wide range of public, private and civil society actors. And its backing of innovative local projects is helping to consolidate democratic gains in numerous communities across the world.

Thus my message to all of you is simple: your work is vital to the Fund's success, and the Fund's success is vital to our Organization's mission.

Dear Board members,

The Democracy Fund is well placed to play a prominent role in increasing democratic participation. It can promote the involvement of civil society and marginalized groups in national decision making processes. It can spread the idea that inclusive political processes enhance the quality and quantity of democratic discourse.

In fact, by establishing programmes and partnerships in 110 countries, you are already helping involve and empower local populations in the political process, and you are entrenching democracy from the ground up.

The Democracy Fund is also publicizing the message that democracy requires the full and equal involvement of women in local and national decision-making processes. Thus, fully half of its projects seek to promote women's rights or gender equality.

These are extremely worthwhile goals, and I commend members of the Advisory Board for supporting them. At the same time, I would also like to encourage all of you to increase assistance to fledgling democracies. Not only do such States need the Fund's expertise and support, your activities also have a disproportionate effect in such transitional settings.

The threats to democracy, especially in transitional settings, are real. Insecurity, violence and corruption can not only undermine the credibility and legitimacy of a nation's leaders and its institutions, it can call into question the entire democratic setup. The United Nations has a special responsibility to address these challenges, and to promote democracy. I am glad that the Democracy Fund is contributing to this effort.

Dear friends,

Let me use this opportunity to reaffirm my commitment to the Democracy Fund and its vital work. As each of you strives to implement the Fund's vision, I stand ready to assist you in any way I can.

Thank you all for your involvement in this important initiative, and please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.

Thank you.