

**Community of Democracies**  
**Ministerial Meeting**  
New York, 20 September 2006

Talking Points for the  
Deputy Secretary-General

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

- From **Warsaw** to **Santiago** and now **Bamako**, the Community of Democracies has promoted the vision of a more representative and effective United Nations and contributed to advancing our common goals of development, security and human rights.
- It has also become a key component of the global dialogue needed to assist and sustain the improvement in the quality of democracy. With **other global processes** like the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, in which most of you participate, it has contributed to widen acceptance of democratic governance within the international community. Our common aspiration is to make democratic values universal and democratic institutions a sine qua non condition for any State to be considered legitimate and modern.
- We have seen how, increasingly, **Democracy matters to the UN, and the UN matters to Democracy**. The UN has done more than any other organization to promote democracy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly in 1948 has inspired constitution-making in every corner of the world, and contributed greatly to the eventual global acceptance of democracy as a universal value.
- In addition, with the assistance of the UN system, major progress has been achieved in terms of fair and regular elections, representative Parliament, accountable government, national and local, predictable justice, honest public office-holders, a free press, civil society organisations as numerous as needed, and a system that protects all rights for all.

The debate on development and democracy has also evolved. **Freedom and democracy are not luxury items: all societies in the world can afford them**. The position on the development index is no reason anymore for lowering the bar of fundamental freedoms – if anything, it has become a motive to increase that level and unleash the capacity of people to move a society ahead with the engine of their freedom. Even in political contexts that do not observe the principles of pluralism, one can observe that effectiveness and success stems from areas of activity such as economic sectors where there is **wider choice, ampler freedom** and a stronger creative impulse. **Democracy is not only right: it actually works**, in many places, to make the people's lives better.

- This is why Democracy was an essential part of the **Secretary-General's Reform plan**: a sustained effort to help build where necessary and strengthen everywhere else the democratic fabric of a nation, the processes, systems and institutions that can be very different in shape and form, but do all result in listening to the voice of the people and respecting their choice.
- The strong Democracy bid has a concrete expression in today's United Nations, it is called the UN Democracy Fund, a new and dynamic platform that we hope is the foundation of **something more important yet to come**. It has all the ingredients: an independent experts' team that harnesses what the UN has best to offer, from political analysts to peacekeepers, from development practitioners to gender specialists, from anti-corruption professionals to human rights experts. It also has a Board on which 11 of your countries serve, from the North and the South, the East and the West, together with stellar academics and leaders of global civil society. The Democracy Fund, institutionally housed in the UN Office for Partnerships, is an important **platform to build alliances** and an example of how indispensable the cooperation **between civil society, governments and the UN** has become to successfully address the challenges of democracy-building.
- A month ago, the Democracy Fund approved its **first round of projects, funding the 125 best projects out of 1,300 concepts that had been submitted and starting to transfer US\$36 million to civil society organisations in 110 countries**.
  - We have two Human Rights Commissions in Africa, **Kenya and Nigeria**, who will dedicate efforts to *monitor the behavior of the law enforcement agencies during election time*.
  - In **Tajikistan**, the Fund is supporting a *network of lawyers who are protecting the journalists* from undue pressure and upholding their freedom of expression; the journalists are in turn supporting the lawyers in their bid for an independent justice.
  - **Transparency Brazil** has created a dynamic Internet portal to *disclose interests of candidates* running for public office, which has been very well received by many candidates themselves;
  - In **Bolivia** and **Zambia**, we are helping facilitate the *constitutional reform deliberations* leading to new Cartae Magnae; in **Chile** and **Colombia**, we support the dialogue that will hopefully lead to *political reform*.
  - We are supporting independent *monitoring of elections* in **seven Arab countries**, assisting **Iraqi journalists** to create their own and *independent national news agency* and setting up the *pilot civil and voter registry* in **Afghanistan**.
  - The rights of *ethnic minorities* in **Thailand**, **Cambodia** or **Georgia**, to name only a few, have been especially targeted by the Fund.
  - We have also supported the *Council of the Communities of Democracy*, so that when your governments meet next year in Bamako, the Civil Society

network that operates in parallel will be able to be in Mali and make their own contribution.

- Half of the projects supported either strongly defend **women's rights or gender equality** in their activities. The message that democracy is not possible without women's full and equal participation is increasingly recognized and transformed into action.
- The geography of the Democracy Fund is mainly that of the developing world, but given that democratic deficits are not to be found only in low income nations: **some projects will support democratic efforts in the North**, as leading civil society institutions have been doing for quite some time in their own countries.
- **Democracy is a perfectible process and not a finish line at which some have arrived and many are still running towards.** We are all in the same race, and would benefit from sharing our experience and knowledge. This is one more thing we aspire to do: to be a *knowledge exchange hub on Democracy Assistance* where all can learn from success and take lessons home from the past to build our own future.
- All this has been possible in a record-time, since the world Summit last year, thanks to the Member States who have traditionally provided unfaltering support to the United Nations in democracy-building over the years, and have continued doing so through this new mechanism. The news is that in this case, countries like India and Qatar, Chile, Senegal and Sri Lanka, Estonia and Georgia, are together in this endeavour with the United States, Germany, France or the UK. We have up to **20 donors to date**, who have made significant or symbolic contributions.
- We have reached a critical juncture, one where we need to decide whether the Democracy Fund will hold the important promise it has made. We have created an expectation amongst the civil society activists of the world who try to make their place a better one, a freer one. This is the time to renew our commitment with the democratic values, through a multilateral support channel that is valued for its **independence and respect for national ownership.**
- The Communities of Democracy has been a fundamental platform to advance an agenda that we share. We thank you for your support and count on you to continue in this venture together.