



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

MESSAGE TO THE ATHENS DEMOCRACY FORUM

15 September 2017

I send warm wishes to the Athens Democracy Forum. I commend you for gathering again in the birthplace of democracy to observe this International Day of Democracy, in cooperation with the United Nations Democracy Fund.

Let me also commend the City of Athens for bestowing the Athens Democracy Award this year upon Felipe González, my friend and ally for twenty-five years, and an inspiration to democracy activists around the world.

The International Day of Democracy is an opportunity to recommit to a world defined by the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter: peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity. Yet, in many societies around the world, there is a crisis of faith. Globalization and technological progress have lifted many out of poverty, but have also contributed to inequality and instability. There is a growing and deepening divide among people, as well as between people and the political establishments that exist to represent them. Fear is driving too many decisions. This is a danger to democracy.

It is time to reconstruct relations between people and leaders -- national and international. It is time for leaders to listen and show that they care about their own people and about the global stability and solidarity on which we all depend. And it is time for the entire international community to address one of its most severe shortcomings: our inability to prevent crises.

To work credibly for prevention, we need to better support countries in their efforts to strengthen their democratic institutions and make their societies more resilient. In some countries, a dangerous illusion has taken hold that democracy is in contradiction to stability or conflict prevention. Quite the contrary: by destroying democratic institutions, by suppressing civil society, by undermining the rule of law and human rights, authoritarian rule creates conditions for extremist ideologies and terrorist activities to thrive. It prevents societies from developing peaceful channels and effective instruments for the resolution of grievances and other challenges. By the same token, toppling a dictator, or holding elections in a post-conflict situation, does not mean that democracy will flourish by itself. It requires leadership, in ensuring that emerging and developing democracies are supported, so that they can succeed. It requires strengthening civil society, empowering women and upholding the rule of law.

These are the conditions that allow democracy, stability and peace to prevail. On this International Day of Democracy, let us dedicate ourselves to those values enshrined in the United Nations Charter -- without double standards, with full commitment, and with full transparency. I thank all of you for coming together to give life to this mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres'.

António Guterres