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Thank you, Stephen Dunbar-Johnson and Achilles Tsaltas as always. And thank you Mayor Kaminis for being such a steadfast ally of this event and of the UN Democracy Fund.

This is my fourth year here, as I have been engaged with the Forum since the beginning. I feel privileged to have been involved as it's grown from a two-hour event to a six-day programme.

As we gather today for the International Day of Democracy, we have heard about the various pressures on democracy, including in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's video message this morning.

I'd like to ring a warning bell about something we haven't talked about so much here this week. That is the shrinking space for civil society.

Civil society is that world of organizations and movements which are neither the state nor the market.

The men and women all over the world who prove that democracy is not a spectator sport.

That it requires ongoing participation.

That this doesn't mean only going to the voting station every four years.

And it doesn't mean tweeting.

It means the daily painstaking work of holding Governments accountable.

Of giving voice to the diverse interests of the population, including its most vulnerable groups.

It means being driven by principles and passions rather than political or private interests.

It means consistently telling the big man or woman in power what they don't want to hear.

It means ensuring scrutiny of the use of natural resources.

In short, it means making sure that democracy delivers.

That's why, in the world's most successful democracies, the State and civil society work together for common goals.

And in post-conflict countries, civil society is crucial as a way to overcome fragility, ensure legitimacy, build confidence in Governments and avoid a relapse into violence.

To have a strong State and strong civil society at the same time is not only possible. It is both desirable and necessary. What do the stable and prosperous states of the world have in common? A combination of both.

And yet: over the past four years, an alarming number of Governments around the world are increasingly addressing civil society as a threat, not a partner.

They have introduced restrictions which limit the ability of non-governmental organizations and civil society to work, or to receive funding, or both.

Since 2012, more than 70 countries have introduced over 120 laws and other restrictive measure at the national or local level.

Many of them copy each other.

Rather than building on a community of good practices, they are creating a community of worst practices.

This includes Governments on every continent. And it includes several states that are otherwise considered established democracies.

This is especially alarming at a time when the countries of the world work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, a transformative global agenda that aims to leave no one behind. This agenda means we must reach those who are rarely seen or heard, and who have no voice or group to speak on their behalf. And it means holding Governments accountable for the commitments they have signed up for.

For Governments to treat civil society as anything but a partner in this mission is profoundly counterproductive.

On this International Day of Democracy, we rededicate ourselves to democracy and dignity for all. Let us advocate for the freedom of civil society to fulfil its mission.