



Annika Savill
Executive Head, UN Democracy Fund

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**Remarks to Side Event Hosted by the UN Democracy Fund
During the Session of the Commission on Status of Women:
Empowerment Through Democracy, Civil Society and Innovation:
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Thank you all for coming in such numbers, including those who travelled long distances or climbed over snowdrifts to get here. I know you've overcome bigger obstacles in your time.

Let me thank, first of all, Ambassador Tanmaya Lal of India and Ambassador Kelley Currie of the United States. Your two countries could be described as the founding mothers of UNDEF; it was these two large democracies who sowed the seeds of UNDEF's creation, by taking a joint initiative 15 years ago that led to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's establishing the Fund in 2005.

This makes UNDEF one of the youngest entities in the UN family.

UNDEF is also the only UN entity to have democracy in its name – as you know, the word “democracy” does not appear in the UN Charter, nor is the concept embraced by all Member States.

Most important, UNDEF the only entity with primary mandate to support democracy through civil society.

Ten years have passed since first UNDEF projects became operational. Our number of projects have surpassed 700, all of them two years long.

We are still entirely funded by voluntary contributions. But the number of UNDEF donor Governments surpassed 45 some time ago. As important, half of these are non-traditional donors in Africa, Arab States, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Our projects span a range of areas: from electoral processes to community activism; from rule of law to youth engagement; from media to strengthening civil society interaction with Government; and last but not least, gender equality and empowering of women.

Needless to say, across all categories of our projects, it is women who tend to be the boldest, the most innovative – and also the most steadfast in implementing initiatives and ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Today, we will hear from four of those women on our fantastic panel, representing a small selection of UNDEF projects in Africa, Arab States, Asia, and Latin America.

As our project implementers will show you, these are initiatives that go far beyond workshops and seminars – they have outcomes so measurable and tangible that you can actually see, hear and touch them.

And they address acute issues of our time – from sanitation challenges in India to security threats to school girls in Nigeria; from slum-dwellers in Latin American cities to the refugee crisis in the Arab states.

To moderate our panel, we have one of the ultimate experts, a scholar who has devoted all her academic life to women, civil society, and grassroots participation: Dr. Wairimu Njoya of Williams College, who has known UNDEF's work well for many years, and this year joined UNDEF as an Advisory Board member. Wairimu will share with us some of her insights, findings and wisdom before the panel discussion.

But first, I am honoured to give the floor to Ambassador Tamrara Lal, the Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the UN, and after that, Ambassador Kelley Currie, the United States Representative to the UN Economic and Social Council. Thank you.

Good luck and thank you.