

UNDEF partners with New York Times in fifth annual Athens Democracy Forum



UNDEFThe United Nations
Democracy Fund**FNUD**Fonds des Nations Unies
pour la démocratie

The annual [Athens Democracy Forum](#) was held on 13-17 September 2017, organized for the fifth year by *The New York Times* in cooperation with the UN Democracy Fund and Athens City Hall. This year's programme included discussions on the future of polling, political discourse in the post-truth era, bridging the generational gap, the power of the political cartoonist, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN Secretary-General sent a message of support to the Forum, attached. Speakers included former UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan, who delivered the Aristotle Lecture, attached, at the Presidential Mansion, where he referenced UNDEF's role in supporting grassroots democracy; President of Greece Prokopios Pavlopoulos; Foreign Minister of Sweden Margot Wallström; Mayor of Athens Georgios Kaminis; former Prime Minister of Spain Felipe González, who was awarded the City of Athens Democracy Award; New York Times CEO Mark Thompson; New York Times writers Roger Cohen, Steven Erlanger, James Bennet; editorial cartoonist Patrick Chappatte; and UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, whose remarks are attached.

Sessions were held at the Zappeion in the National Gardens of Athens; the Stoa of Attalos in the Ancient Agora of Athens – the very birthplace of democracy; and Costa Navarino, a sustainable destination in Messinia, southwest Peloponnese.

Themes at this year's Forum included democracy and conflict prevention; the role of international organizations; political discourse in the post-truth era; the future of polling; and bridging the generational gap.

An interactive lunch in support of the Sustainable Development Goals was hosted by Marianna Vardinoyannos, President of the Marianna V. Vardinoyannos Foundation, focusing on climate action and reducing inequalities. The remarks of Annika Savill to the Sustainable Development Goals segment are attached.

An exhibition on democracy at the Hellenic Children's Museum was opened by the Mayor of Athens and UNDEF Executive Head, Annika Savill, whose remarks at the opening are attached.

For further information about the Forum, please go to www.athensdemocracyforum.com.

“I have been a tireless defender of democracy all my life because I am convinced it is the political system most conducive to peace, sustainable development, the rule of law and the respect for human rights, the three pillars of any healthy and democratic society. As the UN Secretary-General, I oversaw the creation of Democracy Day and the UN’s Democracy Fund, to support grassroots democracy around the world.”

– Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, 2017



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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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



14 SEPTEMBER 2017

SPEECHES, SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY & ELECTIONS WITH INTEGRITY

The Crisis of Democracy

This speech was originally made by Kofi Annan at the [2017 Athens Democracy Forum](#) on 13 September 2017.

Your Excellency, the President of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me start by thanking the *New York Times* for inviting me to this conference here in Greece, the ancient cradle of democracy. This lecture is being given in the name of Aristotle, one of the most enduring thinkers Greece, and indeed the world, has ever produced. His very name means “excellent insight”, and he certainly left us quite a few, which continue to resonate more than 2,000 years after his death. Not least is Aristotle’s recognition that “Man is, by nature, a political animal”. Man is born, lives and dies as a member of a community and the affairs of that community are therefore his and vice-versa. I am honoured to speak in his name and, as you will see, I believe many of his insights are as relevant today as they were in antiquity.

I have been a tireless defender of democracy all my life because I am convinced it is the political system most conducive to peace, sustainable development, the rule of law and the respect for human rights, the three pillars of any healthy and democratic society. [As the UN Secretary General, I oversaw the creation of Democracy Day and the UN’s Democracy Fund, to support grassroots democracy around the world. I am happy to acknowledge the current head of the Fund, Annika Savill, who is here with us this evening.](#) Since leaving the UN, I have set up the [Electoral Integrity Initiative](#) with a group of concerned organisations and individuals who seek to promote the legitimacy of elections as a fundamental pillar of democratic practice. The Kofi Annan Foundation and its partners have just held regional conferences in Latin American and Southeast Asia, which highlighted the challenges democracy faces in those regions, but also peoples’ commitment to its ideals.

We have to admit that democracy is experiencing a crisis of confidence. Not only does it face increasingly assertive opponents, but growing numbers of its beneficiaries either take it for granted, or else doubt its merits. Much has been made of reports by Larry Diamond, the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House that democratic freedoms have been in retreat for eleven straight years in many parts of the world, with the emergence of an increasing number of elected authoritarians. But even in democracy's historic heartlands, we are witnessing a shift in the perceptions and practice of democracy evidenced by ever lower levels of voter participation, falling membership of political parties and declining trust in politicians and institutions. According to Pew, less than a fifth of the American population trust their federal government to "do the right thing most of the time". It used to be three fourths in 1958. Congress, for its part, has a 69% negative rating. This is based on the perception that democracy isn't delivering. Governments appear powerless in the face of such challenges as the Euro crisis, the migration crisis, or the debt crisis. This has set the scene for the resurgence of populism – charismatic individuals or fake prophets promising simplistic solutions to people's grievances through radical policies that dismiss institutions and laws as either irrelevant or inconvenient.

What are the factors driving these challenges to democracy? I see at least three.

First, growing inequality within countries. The uneven benefits of globalisation are dividing societies into winners and losers on an unprecedented scale. Global markets are creating billionaires, whilst the incomes of the middle and working classes in developed countries have stagnated and their livelihoods are becoming ever more vulnerable to technological change and global competition. Compounding inequality, increasingly integrated financial markets have allowed globalisation's footloose winners to park their profits in tax havens, while the tax burden on the middle class continues to rise. Aristotle himself stressed the importance of the middle class for the sustainability of democracy. When wealth is too concentrated, the polity becomes vulnerable to oligarchy. If there are too many poor, the polity can degenerate into populism, disorder and the confiscation of private property. The middle class is the backbone of a democracy and Aristotle advocated that it should always far outnumber both the poor and the rich. The threat to the middle class is therefore a threat to our political systems themselves.

Second, governments are looking increasingly powerless in the face of the imperatives of the global economy and the ever-growing web of regional and global agreements they have entered into. Here in Greece, for example, the inability of Syriza to overturn the EU's austerity policies despite the party's popular mandate to do so no doubt created a sense of disillusionment. I think that the management of the 2008 Great Recession has increased suspicions that democratic governments have been captured by special interests. Whilst the US government was spending trillions in bailing out the big banks, for example, millions of American families lost their homes. In Greece, there is a widespread perception that the EU prioritised the protection of the big European banks' balance sheets over the protection of the Greek population, whose incomes fell by about a third. We are not here to debate the economic arguments of the decisions that were made, but I think the political price of those priorities was high.

Finally, there is a crisis of effectiveness. Democratic government is compared unfavourably with the concurrent success of authoritarian regimes, which seem to enjoy record rates of growth. Whilst the US government's plans to overhaul its infrastructure have been stuck in Congress for almost a decade, China has built the Three Gorges Dam and thousands of kilometres of new railways and roads. People – especially in developing countries that are struggling to overcome poverty and low growth – look at these achievements and wonder whether democratic governance, at least in its western incarnation, really delivers.

These are all real and serious problems that we cannot dismiss, lest the populists of both left and right continue to gain ground. Be that as it may, we need to put these concerns into historical perspective. The setbacks of the last decade have to be set against remarkable gains since the end of the Second World War, when there were only twelve fully-fledged democracies. Today there are 117, and elections, however flawed, have become almost universal, illustrating the power of legitimacy they offer. We should not forget that liberal democracy almost died in the 1930s, but the liberal democracies eventually defeated Nazism, Fascism *and* Democracy is therefore arguably the most successful political system the world has ever seen. Polls show that most people around the world aspire to more freedom, more rule of law, more accountability and more say in politics. In short, democracy remains a universal aspiration.

Why? Because it actually delivers: of the twenty countries with highest levels of human development as measured by the UN's human development index, nineteen are liberal democracies. Among the top forty, thirty-six are liberal democracies. And even the citizens of poorer democracies live, on average, nine years longer than citizens of poor autocracies, because they have better access to health and education. Democracies are also less vulnerable to famines and conflicts. Most importantly, however, as my friend Amartya Sen has cogently argued, freedom itself is development. Subordination to the caprices of other human beings, rather than to the law, is a source of despair to the human soul.

I am sceptical about the sustainability of "authoritarian growth". In most cases, both historically and globally, those regimes become fragile when growth slows or ends, because they have no other sources of legitimacy. So rather than looking for alternatives to liberal democracy, we should instead seek to reform our systems through concrete measures in at least three areas.

First, we need to make our democracies more effective. Much of the debate in our democracies turns on the politics of redistribution and public spending, but not enough on effectiveness. We are trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions. We must harness new technologies and management techniques to overhaul the administration of the state to make our democracies less bureaucratic and more responsive to families and individuals, especially those who cannot afford high-priced lawyers and lobbyists.

Second, we need to tackle inequality, both economic and political. As I have said, increasing inequality is one of the drivers of resentment, especially since economic equality leads to political inequalities as well, as several studies have confirmed. There is a growing perception that the priorities of the extremely wealthy take precedence over the well-being of the middle class thanks to campaign contributions and lobbying. At the other end of the

spectrum, the poor and minorities are, or at least feel, excluded from the political system. Governments must respond by redistributing fairly the benefits of globalisation by restricting tax avoidance and evasion schemes, and most importantly, discouraging tax havens. Fortunately, democracy is one of the only systems in which the concerns of the majority can overturn the interests of the wealthy if the majority harnesses the mechanisms at their disposal. But this demands more participation, not less.

This means that we need to make our democracies more inclusive. This requires bold and innovative reforms to bring in the young, the poor and minorities into the political system. An interesting idea put forward by one of your speakers this week, Mr. Reybrouk, would be to reintroduce the ancient Greek practice of selecting parliaments by lot instead of election. In other words, parliamentarians would no longer be nominated by political parties, but chosen at random for a limited term, in the way many jury systems work. This would prevent the formation of self-serving and self-perpetuating political classes disconnected from their electorates.

Third and finally, we need to champion democracy. The victory over Nazism, fascism and communism were also ideological struggles that were won on the battlefield of ideas as well. Yet many of the tools of that battle have been abandoned or are underfunded today. Democracy's enemies are spending billions to undermine it, both in practice and through misinformation. In a world of "alternative facts", who do we believe? We know that armies of state-financed trolls are creating "AstroTurf movements" to sow the seeds of mistrust and disunity to weaken our democracies. We must not let them win by abdication. Democracies have to reclaim the lost ground by defending and promoting liberal ideas, just as they did against democracy's past ideological enemies.

Athenian democracy illustrates that practice never meets the ideal – women could not vote and slavery was common practice. Moreover, ancient Athenian democracy was sometimes hijacked by oligarchies, reminding us that democracy is vulnerable. We should remember that democracy is always a work in progress. But a system created thousands of years ago continues to inspire democrats throughout the world today. We must cherish, reform and defend democracy, or else it may be lost for future generations. As another great democrat who drew inspiration from ancient Athens, Thomas Jefferson, put it, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance."



Annika Savill
Executive Head, UN Democracy Fund

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Remarks to fifth annual Athens Democracy Forum
Stoa of Attalos, Ancient Agora, Athens, 14 September 2017

Let me thank all the team of The New York Times for organizing yet another successful Athens Democracy Forum. It is an honour to be here for the fifth time, and to have been a founder member of this Forum together with you, Mr. Mayor and Achilles Tsaltas. I bring warm greetings from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to all participants.

It is also a pleasure to welcome our keynote speaker Margot Wallström, my compatriot and former UN colleague. Having a Swedish foreign minister with a UN background has become a tradition at this Forum. This is the third time we are honoured by someone with both those attributes.

So here we are again quoting Pericles and Aristotle to each other. When we first launched this Forum back in 2013, Greece was in profound crisis and most other Western democracies felt they were doing relatively well. They wondered why Greece, the cradle of democracy and civilization, had become the sickest man of Europe – and one afflicted by racist violent extremism.

Today, just four years later, the case is almost the opposite. Several supposedly stronger nations are struggling with extremist and xenophobic movements, while Greece has rejected these groups. Perhaps this is because the people of Greece can identify deeply with the hurt being inflicted on migrants and refugees. Because unlike many other Western countries, Greeks acutely remembers their own refugee nightmares, from war and dictatorship, just a few decades ago.

Today around the world, we face turmoil. Some yearn for authoritarian rule as an imagined road to stability. But let me quote to you from the message of Secretary-General Guterres to this Forum. And I quote: “It is time for the entire international community to address one of its most severe shortcomings: our inability to prevent crises. 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.” End quote.

I would add that speaking the truth takes two: one to talk, the other to hear. My work with the UN Democracy Fund has shown me that an open discussion among men and women sitting under a tree can do more for participatory democracy than all the government summits and cabinet meetings in the world. When grass-roots activists, community organizers, labour mobilizers, youth and women leaders, come together at their own initiative, all with a stake in the outcome, they will persevere until all sides have a say.

This inclusive discourse must never end. As important, there must be someone in the capital listening. A confident nation gives citizens a role in the development of their country; the most effective, stable and successful democracies are in fact those where a strong civil society works in partnership with the state, while holding it accountable at the same time. This is what creates a virtuous circle of rights and opportunity under the rule of law, underpinned by a vibrant civil society and an enterprising private sector, backed by efficient and accountable state institutions. Social and economic development is far more likely to take hold if people are given a genuine say in their own governance, and a chance to share in the fruits of progress. Conversely, faced with bleak prospects and unresponsive governments, people will act on their own to reclaim their future.

In other words, democracy is not a spectator sport. And it is more like a marathon than a sprint. It is a long struggle waged by individuals, communities and nations. On this International Day of Democracy, let us commit to playing our part to the full.

Thank you.



Annika Savill
Executive Head, UN Democracy Fund

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**Remarks to the Interactive Sustainable Development Goals Lunch
at the fifth annual Athens Democracy Forum
The Zappeion, Athens, 15 September 2017**

Thank you, Marianna Vardinoyannis, for hosting this lunch and for your vision and generosity.

You are an inspiration to us at the United Nations.

Let me equally thank Mr. Luca Belgiorno–Nettis for his invaluable support, creativity and input to this interactive session.

Thank you all for coming today to this interactive lunch on the Sustainable Development Goals. Reaching agreement on the seventeen Goals was a unique achievement by all the Governments of the world.

But meeting the Goals will, of course, be the real achievement.

You sometimes hear the Goals referred to as United Nations Goals. But they are the Goals of every country – Governments, civil society and the private sector.

Today, you will focus on two of the Goals – reducing inequalities and climate action. This will help concentrate your minds.

But if you think about it, these two Goals are intimately related to every single one of the other Goals. From reducing poverty to quality education to good health – the latter being the cause that you champion so passionately, Mrs Vardinoyannis.

Many of you here today represent the private sector, which is, of course, indispensable to meeting the Goals. Several are members of the Global Compact, the United Nations initiative that encourages businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies. The good news today is that the UN Global Compact will launch a toolkit next week to provide you with specific guidance on how to work towards the Goals. So please keep an eye on the UN Global Compact website.

Your deliberations today will be summarised by our note takers and conveyed to the UN Global Compact in New York.

So please be bold and creative in your discussions.

Good luck and thank you

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Annika Savill
Executive Head, UN Democracy Fund

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Remarks on opening of Hellenic Children's Museum Exhibition
Democracy for Me!
Athens, 12 September 2017

It is an honour and a pleasure to be here yet again for this annual event devoted to democracy and children.

Allow me to pay tribute to my friends Mayor Giorgos Kaminis and Deputy Mayor Maria Iliopoulou for their vision and leadership on behalf of Athens' youngest citizens.

Let me also congratulate all of you on this new magnificent location for the Hellenic Children's Museum. It is like a modern-day version of the Stoa of Attalos in the Ancient Agora.

Looking back, I am proud to have been one of the initiators of this side event for children, four years ago.

Because at the UN, we know that democracy not only starts from the bottom; it starts from birth.

No person is born a good citizen; no country is born a democracy.

Both are processes that must begin at the start of life and continue over a lifetime.

To all young people who come to this museum, I would say:

Democracy is your future. It is an uncontested fact that living in a democracy gives you the choices and the opportunities to do what you want to do with your life.

But democracy is not a spectator sport. You need to play your part. You need to vote, debate, organize, and question those in power – including your parents.

But then again, since you are Greek, you will know how to do all that.

Equally, you will soon learn that democracy is more like a marathon than a sprint. It is a long struggle.

Greeks know that too. It is never too soon to start. Or too late to continue.

That's my message to the young citizens of Athens today. I wish you courage on your journey.

Thank you very much.