

**UNDEF**

The United Nations  
Democracy Fund



**FNUD**

Fonds des Nations Unies  
pour la démocratie

**Annika Savill**  
**Executive Head**

--

**Opening Remarks at UN Event on International Day of Democracy**  
**New York, 16 September 2019**

Thank you all for coming. Happy International Day of Democracy. Let me thank International IDEA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, not only our co-hosts today but allies and partners all year round.

I am Annika Savill, Executive Head of the UN Democracy Fund, the only UN entity with 'democracy' in its name, and the only UN entity with the primary mandate of working directly with civil society to support democracy.

Your presence here today bears out that democracy is a two-way street. A constant dialogue that must have real influence on political decisions.

And today, as we grapple with growing challenges to democracy, this Day is more than an observance. It is an opportunity to remind governments of the right to participation and inclusion in all phases of decision-making --- before, during and after.

Let's take a moment to recall what that means in practice.

**Participating before decision-making:** This means a role in shaping the agenda of decision-making processes. Whether this be online, public hearings, or working groups or committees. All with transparent and inclusive criteria.

**Participating during decision-making:** From an early stage, when all options are still open. That means, for example, public authorities should refrain from taking any irreversible decisions or investments before the start of the process.

**Participating after decision-taking:** Through timely, comprehensive and transparent dissemination of information. Through access to mechanisms for review, lessons

learned, monitoring and evaluation of implementation. Through channels that ensure you are heard.

On specifics, I urge you to make use of the OHCHR Guidelines for *States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs*. And while you are here, please pick up a copy of the UNDEF book, *Democracy As If People Matter*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We saw this kind of participation and inclusion at first hand in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, where the process was broad and inclusive.

We also see it in the formulation of the Goals themselves.

Not only Goal 16, which calls for inclusive and participatory societies and institutions. But in all the Goals.

Democratic participation and inclusion run through the Goals like a silver thread, from universal access to resources, health care and education, to decent work opportunities for all.

Yet, less than four years after Goal 16 was adopted, some of its key principles are being challenged and undermined. And in many countries, we are light years away from the kind of participation and inclusion I just described.

Ethnic nationalism is growing, and with it, hate speech, intolerance, discrimination and violence.

Shrinking and sometimes closing civic space is spreading on every continent, with legal and political barriers suppressing and weakening civil society.

Freedom of expression is threatened by interference or violence against those who gather and report information to the public -- journalists, media workers and human rights defenders.

And we are seeing an alarming rise in attacks on elected representatives -- both verbal and physical -- in both established and emerging democracies.

As we speak, the UN is gearing up for five major summits this month. And preparing for a decade that will make or break the global Goals by the 2030 deadline.

So there is no time to lose.

Again, that means bringing decision-making closer to the people. Updating our model of democracy through participation and inclusion. Listening carefully to the concerns of communities that feel threatened by change or left behind. Taking young people *very* seriously. Exploring new avenues beyond elections, such as citizen assemblies.

To explore these questions today, we have a range of experts and activists. I'm excited to hear how they see the road ahead.

But first, let's get inspired by a video message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Thank you.