The Secretary-General has issued a widely awaited Guidance Note on Democracy to all parts of the United Nations Secretariat, setting out the UN framework and committing the Organization to action in support of democracy. The Note, which followed the Secretary-General’s call in 2007 for an organization-wide strategy for democracy support, was the product of many months’ collaboration by several entities of the UN, including UNDEF.

People and Governments look to the United Nations as an impartial, peaceful and legitimate means to seed and strengthen the foundations of democracy from within. The Note emphasizes the importance of supporting civil society – the backbone of UNDEF’s work:

“A freely functioning, well-organized, vibrant and responsible civil society is essential for a democracy. This presumes an active role for non-governmental organizations and democratic reform groups, human rights groups, women’s groups, youth groups, social movements, trade unions, minority representatives, professional societies and community groups, watchdog associations and others. Such groups have historically made important contributions to the formulation, advocacy and defense of democratic rights. To ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information is also critical to the democratic process. The UN actively assists and supports these vital elements of society.”

Introducing the Note in a speech at an UNDEF event for the International Day of Democracy, the Secretary-General noted that given the lively debate worldwide about democracy promotion, it had become necessary to ensure that international efforts in support of democracy were widely acceptable and accepted. People and Governments looked to the United Nations as an impartial, peaceful and legitimate means to seed and strengthen the foundations of democracy from within.

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The Guidance Note sums up the challenges for the United Nations:

“In the twenty-first century, we continue to be confronted with the triple challenge of building or restoring democracies, preserving democracies, as well as improving the quality of democracies. Key challenges for the UN in this context are: how to more effectively promote universally recognized democratic principles, institutions and practices; how to respond, in a consistent and predictable manner, to ruptures with democracy, as triggered by coups d’état or other unconstitutional transfers of power; and how to respond to, or even help to prevent, the slow and gradual erosion in the quality of democracy and the weakening of democratic freedoms, practices and institutions which sometimes occur.

“In the face of such on-going challenges, and given the intensive debate surrounding democracy assistance, it is more important than ever to find an effective and acceptable universal framework for conducting such support. To address this issue, in November 2007, the Secretary-General requested the development of an ‘organization-wide strategy that further defines the UN approach to supporting democracy’, anchoring this in the three pillars of the UN’s work – peace and security, development and human rights.

“This note sets out the United Nations framework for democracy based on universal principles, norms and standards, emphasizing the internationally agreed normative content, drawing on lessons learned from experience and outlining the areas of support in which the UN has comparative advantages.”

The UN actively assists and supports these vital elements of society.”

**IN THIS ISSUE**

**INSIDE UNDEF**
- SG Guidance Note on Democracy
- UNDEF applications open in November
- Deloitte to monitor UNDEF projects
- UNDEF staff wins essay contest
- SG joins UNDEF on Day of Democracy
- Practitioner Profile

**NEWS FROM THE FIELD**
- Change for women in Bangladesh
- Empowering women in Turkey
- Argentine women against corruption
- Women of the future in Jamaica
- DIGNITY ON THE MEND

**WORTH READING**
- UNDEF and responsibility to protect
- UNDEF and ‘the ninth MDG’
- UNDEF backs Bratislava gathering
- Journal of Democracy en Español
- Handbook on Asian judicial reform
Fourth Round of Funding opens for applications on 16 November

On 16 November, UNDEF will open the call for applications for its Fourth Round of Funding, following the green light given by UNDEF Advisory Board. Updated guidelines will be posted on our website. The selection process is expected to be highly rigorous and competitive, considering that for the Third Round, some 70 project proposals were selected out of more than 2,100 received. You may wish to prepare by looking at our feedback and lessons learned issued to the Third Round applicants in English and in French. The feedback provides pointers on how to:

- Find a way to improve the application to reach the ‘pass mark’
- Be clear about what you want to achieve and how you propose to do it
- Make your proposal innovative so its stands out from the others
- Ensure a direct link to advancing the cause of democracy
- Write clearly and accurately
- Keep the amount requested realistic
- Ensure the budget relates to outputs listed
- Don’t leave submission to the last day

To form a general idea of what will be expected, you can also study project proposal guidelines.

Deloitte signs on to observe UNDEF projects

Chip Cottrell (centre right), a Partner at Deloitte Financial Advisory Services, and Susan Schumacher, (far right) Deloitte National FAS Community Involvement Leader, sign a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDEF Executive Head Roland Rich and Senior Programme Officer Mikiko Sawanishi for pro bono observing of UNDEF project milestones. UNDP also assists UNDEF with project monitoring. By partnering with Deloitte, UNDEF is opening the door to monitoring by a non-UN entity with a global presence and a strong reputation for probity. The first milestone monitored was for a project in Jamaica, covered in our News from the Field section on page 5.
Secretary-General celebrates with UNDEF on International Day of Democracy

On the Second International Day of Democracy, 15 September 2009, the United Nations Democracy Fund organized an event at UN Headquarters featuring a keynote speech by the Secretary-General, and a screening of “Please Vote For Me” -- a documentary about a classroom election campaign in Wuhan, China.

The film is part of “Why Democracy” -- an UNDEF-supported international documentary project using film to start a global conversation about democracy.

In his speech, the Secretary-General spoke about the role of the United Nations in democracy support -- through its convening power, its impartiality and its universal values. “That means using our comparative advantage,” he said. “Often, we can go where other entities may find it harder to operate. Often, we can go where other actors do not or cannot go.” The Secretary-General looked at what the UN’s work for democracy means in practice, drawing on initiatives made possible by support from the United Nations Democracy Fund -- from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and Palestine to Myanmar, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Executive Director, Bineta Diop, said “UNDEF’s role in advancing women’s right and empowerment in Africa cannot be under-estimated”. Citing The Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Liberia and Sudan as examples, Mrs. Diop said: “Over the years, UNDEF has amplified voices that propelled African women in to leadership and decision-making roles, as well as democratization processes in both post-conflict and conflict-prone societies.”

Femmes Africa Solidarité, FAS, serves as one of two civil society organizations on the UNDEF Advisory Board for 2009. Since it was created just over a decade ago by African women from a range of backgrounds, FAS has become widely respected for strengthening women’s leadership, supporting and promoting women’s initiatives in conflict prevention, management and resolution, and advocating for African women’s rights and concerns at all levels.

FAS is credited with several achievements, including playing a key role in the Burundi peace negotiation and democratization process, promoting women’s participation in the Inter-Congolese dialogue, and advancing the adoption, monitoring and evaluation of UN Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security as well as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

Femmes Africa Solidarité’s
**NEWS FROM THE FIELD**

### Changing the mindset for women in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, UNDEF supports a groundbreaking initiative to mainstream gender equality issues into broader policy and promote informed policy interventions to improve the status of women. The project, implemented by the Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha Organization, is the first in Bangladesh to conduct nationwide analyses on public policies affecting women and marginalized groups.

In June 2009, the project gathered representatives from Government, NGOs, think tanks and research institutions to debate a study on “Promoting Rights of Women through Changing Mindset.” The study identifies political, social, religious and financial barriers to women’s empowerment, and makes policy recommendations on the need for disaggregated data as well as tax and legal reforms. In this way, the project advances policy actions that introduce gender perspectives in national plans and programmes to make democracy work for all Bangladesh.

### Empowering women in Turkey

Achieving the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment is a demanding task for Turkey. In the Marmara region, UNDEF supports a project to raise awareness of women’s citizenship rights, to increase their participation and representation in Turkey’s decision making-process and political life.

Run by the Association for the Training and Education of Women’s Candidates, KA-DEF, the project brought together women from NGOs for a workshop on gender equality, democracy, governance and rights, as well as communication, conflict resolution, self-confidence and advocacy. Each topic was given parallel perspectives introduced by the UN, Government and civil society, and the trainees were equipped to conduct similar programs at the local level. “Having an open space platform gave a way for all of us to express ourselves,” one said. “This brought for us a culture of active listening and understanding of one another which leads to further cooperation.”
NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Argentine women unite against corruption and trafficking

In Argentina, UNDEF supports a pioneering project to fight the impact on women of all forms of corruption, including human trafficking. Implemented by the Fundación Mujeres en Igualdad, MEI, the project organizes women in political parties and civil society to fight corruption that affects their rights and hamper their social and economical progress.

In September 2009, MEI staged “A World Against Trafficking”, a worldwide campaign which included a collection of photographs and videos as well as a music festival. Through blogs, the campaign reached out to young people, the population most vulnerable to trafficking. It also appealed to the “customers” of prostitution to consider the human cost of their actions.

Also in 2009, MEI produced a documentary film titled “Gender and Corruption” to educate the public on a subject that remains sensitive and rarely discussed in Argentina. The film draws on the knowledge and experience of former and current public servants, members of specialized international agencies and civil society organizations. It shows how women, already disadvantaged, suffer all the more from the loss of resources caused by corruption, how gender inequality can obstruct women’s access to justice and information, and how women, as victims of corruption, can even be forced to pay with their bodies.

By empowering women to be informed citizens, overseeing public funds, policies and management, UNDEF and MEI are working for democracy to serve as a framework for inclusion and the rightful delivery of public policy.

You can view the documentary: Part I, Part II, Part III, Part IV.

Seeking out future women leaders of Jamaica

Despite successes in education, women continue to be severely under-represented on Boards and Commissions in Jamaica. The absence of women from the boardroom in the public and private sectors appears to be entrenched in the corporate governance practices.

With UNDEF support, the Women’s Resource and Outreach Centre is conducting a project to prepare more women for positions at the highest levels of public and private sector governance. By actively seeking out women with leadership potential and establishing a personal and professional network, WROC aims to help more women pursue and accept positions on Boards and Commissions both at the national and local levels.

A key component is a three-day training course covering corporate governance, women’s rights, gender analysis of socio-economic and political policies, financial management and transformational leadership. The first of four sessions in different locations took place in Kingston in September 2009, with speakers from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds.

The training marked the first UNDEF milestone observed by Deloitte Financial Advisory Services as part of their pro bono observation of UNDEF projects. The Deloitte observer reported: “Overall, WROC should be commended for all the hard work that was put into the programme, and UNDEF should be proud of its investment in the future of Jamaican women.”

Renforcer les capacités des acteurs ivoiriens des droits de l’homme

In June 2009, the Action for the Protection of Human Rights, with support from the FNUD, implemented a project to promote the rights of the human, taking into account the development of the right of citizens, overseeing public funds, policies and management, UNDEF and MEI are working to promote democracy to serve as a framework for inclusion and the rightful delivery of public policy.

You can view the documentary: Part I, Part II, Part III, Part IV.

A cet effet, l’Action pour la Protection des Droits de l’Homme, avec le soutien du FNUD, met en œuvre un projet pour permettre aux ivoiriens de participer de manière constructive à la promotion des droits de l’homme et à l’instauration d’un véritable État de droit. Le projet vise à renforcer les capacités des acteurs ivoiriens et à sensibiliser la société civile.

Susciter des changements positifs nécessite renforcer les capacités de la société civile.

En juin 2009, le projet a organisé un atelier de formation pour permettre aux ivoiriens de participer de manière constructive à la promotion des droits de l’homme et à l’instauration d’un véritable État de droit. Le projet vise à renforcer les capacités des acteurs ivoiriens afin d’organiser une campagne nationale de promotion et de plaidoyer en faveur des droits humains.
WORTH READING

UN Democracy Fund and the responsibility to protect

At a General Assembly debate on the responsibility, Chile’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz, spoke of UNDEF as one of the mechanisms to be supported in building societies less at risk of the occurrence of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Ambassador Muñoz subsequently circulated an essay making the point.

“International mechanisms for the promotion of democracy such as the United Nations Democracy Fund... should be strengthened to lend democratic governance support to countries that so request it. In the long run, the expansion of democracy could be a useful means to prevent the occurrence of atrocities”

Bratislava hosts UNDEF-backed conference on poverty, inequality, and democracy


UNDEF helps Journal of Democracy take a bow en español

The Spanish edition of Journal of Democracy made its debut in July 2009. This UNDEF-funded annual publication is a collaboration between the International Forum for Democratic Studies of the National Endowment for Democracy and the Institute of Political Science of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. It will feature articles from the Journal of Democracy of particular relevance to Latin America.

UNDEF support brings judicial reform to Oxford University Press

An UNDEF-backed project to strengthen the Asia Pacific Judicial Reform Forum and develop a judicial reform handbook has concluded with the publication of Searching for Success in Judicial Reform: Voices from the Asia Pacific Experience by the Oxford University Press. The book brings together critical reflections on the practical experience of judicial reform in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, The Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu. The launch of the book has triggered new partnerships and brought important stakeholders into the Forum — a network of some 50 superior courts and justice sector agencies in the Asia-Pacific.

UNDEF and the “ninth Millennium Development Goal”

The President of Mongolia spoke to the opening of the UN General Assembly about democracy as inherently woven into the Millennium Development Goals, noting that Mongolia was the first country to adopt “a ninth MDG” on “strengthening human rights, fostering democratic governance and zero tolerance to corruption”. He applauded the growing role of the United Nations in fostering democracy and good governance, singling out the UN Democracy Fund as “a notable example”.

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