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Mr. Mayor, President Tusk, Excellencies, Friends,

I am proud to be here for this seventh consecutive Forum. And proud to have been a founding partner of this annual gathering. Let me thank the new Mayor of Athens for giving us such strong support, and the former Mayor for his unstinting commitment during five years before that.

All of you, as participants in this Forum, have a task before you that I hope will be inspired by Athens as the cradle of democracy, as well as its heroes and ghosts.

To illustrate how important that is, let me start with a current anecdote.

Last month, the Government of Sweden proposed scrapping from the general school curriculum the lessons about ancient Athens. This was meant to allow for more time on modern Swedish history.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you, there was such a massive uproar among intellectuals, editorial writers and historians throughout the country, that the Swedish Government had to reverse the decision. This ultra-modern society reinstated antiquity. Pericles is alive and well in the classrooms of Sweden.

I mention this to illustrate how important ancient Greece still is to modern democrats, and how fitting it is that this forum takes place in Athens.

So I am the Head of the UN Democracy Fund – the only UN entity with ‘democracy’ in its name, and the only UN entity that exists to work directly with civil society to support democracy. From that vantage point, let me take a few moments to look at how much has changed since the first Forum in 2013.

Back then, discussions about democracy were practically unheard of inside the United Nations. After all, in the UN, we are not all democrats. The word democracy appears nowhere in the UN Charter. About half of the world’s countries do not embrace it as a form of governance. Others believe democracy begins and ends with elections alone.

In the UN, tradition has always been to state that there is no one democratic model that fits all societies. No one pace of democratization suits all countries. No yardstick by which all democracies could be measured. In other words, we spoke only of what democracy is not. And never about what it is.

But the alarm bells sounding louder about democracy in recent years have changed all that. Now we talk about it a lot.

As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says in his message to you, printed in your programme, this Forum takes place at a time when trust is low and anxiety is high.

You all know the dystopian trends. Maybe it makes sense that a shining exception to can be found here in Greece itself. Against some formidable odds, democracy is now doing pretty well here.

But for all of you here, this Forum must be an opportunity to reconvert people around the world to democracy.

It means updating the traditional model by listening carefully to communities that feel threatened by change or left behind. It means exploring new democratic avenues beyond elections. It means exploring tools like citizen assemblies, that include randomly chosen members from all sectors of society, not just the political class. And it means taking young people *very* seriously.

These are not easy questions. But if Athens did it 2500 years ago, it can inspire you to do the same this week. Be bold. Ask yourself, what would Pericles have done? I wish you courage and luck.

Thank you.