

Building the World Movement for Democracy

Inaugural World Assembly

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Founding Statement, adopted by the New Delhi Conference, on February 17, 1999

We are democrats of different nations and cultures who have gathered in India, the world's largest democracy, to consider how the prospect for democracy in the world can be advanced on the eve of a new millennium. It is our belief that the time has come for democrats throughout the world to develop new forms of cooperation to promote the development of democracy. Such cooperation is needed to strengthen democracy where it is weak, to reform and invigorate democracy even where it is longstanding, and to bolster pro-democracy groups in countries that have not yet entered into a process of democratic transition.

We welcome this gathering of delegates drawn from over 80 countries and from many different sectors to build a world movement for democracy. We affirm that the movement toward democracy is a process which a large number of countries are part of, and which no one country has completely achieved or applied consistently to itself or to others. While holding that the forms of democratic governance are plural (there being no single model of democracy to be followed), we have been inspired by the experiences of those who have been in the forefront of democracy movements in countries that have taken the democratic path in recent years.

Developing a movement of democrats from all regions of the world has become feasible today owing to the dramatic expansion of democracy during the past 25 years.

It has also become necessary--urgently so--as a means of responding to the unprecedented global interchange of people, ideas, and goods that has transformed the world. Only by successfully adapting to these new conditions can democrats remain an effective and influential worldwide force. The continued durability and dynamism of democracy globally requires a worldwide community of democrats--leading figures from politics, associational life, business, trade unions, the mass media, academia, and policy analysis organizations from all regions who are united by shared democratic values and a commitment to mutual support and solidarity.

The goal of building a worldwide movement for democracy presupposes the universality of the democratic idea. We believe that human beings aspire to freedom by their very nature, and that no single culture has a monopoly on democratic values. The tradition of democracy has been

enriched by contributions from many cultures, and the development of democracy is open to people everywhere. Neither the history nor the culture of a nation can justify violations of human rights, either directly by government or indirectly through mob or criminal violence. Even in countries where democracy is weak or nonexistent, the courage and self-sacrifice demonstrated daily by countless trade unionists, civic leaders, human rights and other pro-democracy activists eloquently affirm the principle of democratic universalism.

The recent period of democratic expansion has seen the spread of democratic elections to well over half of the world's 190 countries. Despite these gains, and in some respects because of them, the effort to foster the further development of democracy today faces two historic challenges:

The first is to consolidate recent democratic gains by deepening democracy beyond its electoral form. This involves, among other things:

- improving protection for human rights and the rule of law;
- strengthening judicial and legislative institutions, as well as other agencies to hold state power accountable;
- empowering democratic governance at the local level;
- ensuring the equal status and full participation of women;
- empowering marginalized groups to become partners in the restructuring of their societies;
- invigorating civil society and the autonomous mass media;
- securing fundamental workers rights, especially freedom of association;
- ensuring that those who work nonviolently for the democratic transformation of their societies are provided the space and resources needed for their task;
- controlling corruption and promoting transparency;
- extending civilian control over the military;
- cultivating democratic values and beliefs; and
- resolving conflicts over minority group rights and claims through the spirit and mechanisms of democracy.

The second challenge is to promote political liberalization and democratic transition in the remaining authoritarian systems. This may not come about quickly. But it is important to do what is possible in each situation to assist the variety of groups and individuals who are working through nonviolent means for democratic opening and change.

To help maintain the global momentum for democratic progress, we believe there is a need for a worldwide network of democratic practitioners and thinkers, committed to mutual support, exchange, and cooperation. We hereby adopt for our network the name, "World Movement for Democracy." This global network will include:

- political party representatives who are seeking the reform and renewal of political parties and party systems;
- leaders of NGOs and other professionals working to improve human rights; institutionalize transparency and accountability; modernize the legal system; strengthen representative institutions; enhance the status of women in politics, society, and the economy; incorporate other excluded groups; promote civic education; and otherwise reform and invigorate democracy;
- trade unionists committed to giving workers a democratic voice in a rapidly changing global economy;
- business leaders committed to democracy, economic competition, and accountable and transparent corporate governance;
- leaders of policy research institutes and other scholars and analysts who are not merely studying the conditions for democracy but advancing concrete initiatives for institutional and policy reform;
- civic (and other) educators who are working both within and outside the formal school system and in various arenas in civil society to develop in their fellow citizens the values, skills, and knowledge that undergird a free and participatory society;
- religious leaders who are working for the freedom of conscience and the freedom to worship of all peoples and faiths;
- representatives of international democracy foundations that provide financial and technical assistance to pro-democracy groups in transitional and authoritarian countries;
- independent journalists, broadcasters and other specialists in communications who can help pro-democracy groups utilize new information technologies as tools for democracy-building.

Promoting cooperation among democrats is hardly novel. Where democracy has been achieved, it has been primarily through the struggles of the people of those countries, but these have often been energized by the diffusion of democratic ideas, strategies, and norms across national boundaries, and by the practical support provided by non-governmental organizations in established democracies. But there are now many additional opportunities, as more of the established democracies become involved in democracy assistance, and as the newer democracies themselves become active in engaging and providing assistance to other emerging democracies and transitional regimes.

The goal of the World Movement for Democracy is not to create a new centralized organization that will make decisions on its own. Indeed, the movement is not an organization as such. Rather, it is a proactive network of democrats that will meet periodically (not less than once every two years) to exchange ideas and experiences and to foster collaboration among democratic forces around the world.

In creating a forum of democrats from established democracies, new democracies, and transitional and authoritarian countries, we believe that it is important to avoid any impression of a patron-client relationship.

To this end, the network will provide an arena of interaction for all those who feel the need for support and those capable of providing it in various ways. Those struggling to open up closed societies will find in the movement a network of democrats sympathetic to their causes. Those seeking to deepen and reform democracy in their own country, and those wanting to provide effective democratic assistance from the outside, will find new means of communication and shared learning to enhance their effectiveness. Similarly, democratic think tanks, scholars, and policy analysts will find in the network an exciting additional channel for the exchange of ideas, projects, research findings, reform initiatives, and institutional designs for democracy. The network may also help to enhance the international resources now available for financial and technical assistance to democratic development.

While the network will be non-governmental, it appreciates that governments have a vital role to play in fostering institutional cooperation to promote democracy.

The network recognizes the importance of transparency and fairness in the functioning of international institutions. And it resolves to ensure the full and equal involvement of representatives of all regions in its own future activities, including preparatory work for future meetings of the World Movement for Democracy.

Our inaugural assembly in India is just a start. There is a great task ahead. We are confident that this new movement will take root and grow stronger, and that it will help people throughout the world who aspire to democracy as a way of life for themselves and future generations.