

Civil Society and the Community of Democracies

Remarks by Robert LaGamma, President of CCD

for the November 16, 2009 Brussels Roundtable on the Community of Democracies and the CD

I am honored to be here in the capital of Europe, the Athens of the modern world, a place that for me is the center of gravity for global democracy in our time.

I represent the civil society pillar of the Community of Democracies, the nongovernmental International Steering Committee or ISC. The ISC consists of leaders of 25 democracy civil society organizations from all world regions. My own organization, CCD or the Council for a Community of Democracies had long called for the democracies of the world to work together to advance their common values and has been devoted to supporting the CD since its launch in Warsaw in 2000. Among others represented here are Roel von Meijenfeldt and David French.

Our objective has been to build a network of civil society networks that together form a grassroots global citizen constituency for the CD. We seek to represent community organizers, human rights activists, freedom fighters, journalists seeking freedom of expression, lawyers striving to establish rule of law, nongovernmental organizations fighting for freedom of association and assembly.

Together we strive to call the attention of democratic governments to threats to democracy and to oppose those threats. We seek practical ways of working with governments to unravel and confront the problems that engage civil society organizations in their quest for democracy.

We have worked closely with the governments of the Community to promote the development of a democracy caucus at the United Nations, the creation of a U.N. Democracy Fund to support civil society and the creation of the Warsaw Permanent Secretariat of the CD as well as the creation of the Budapest International Centre for Democratic Transition. We have organized regional roundtables for democracy activists to identify issues of democracy and bring them to the attention of the CD. We plan a new cycle of those roundtables next year.

We have developed on behalf of the CD the Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support that will hold its first regional workshop at the College of Europe in Poland later this week. Additional workshops planned for Bruges and Santiago, Chile early next year.

We have advocated and developed plans to promulgate democracy education that we consider to be the glue that holds democracies together and creates cultures of democracy.

We are expanding our networks and plan to work closely with the CD Chair, Lithuania to strengthen the Community. It is our profound hope to energize the CD by involving the remainder of the world's major democracies, especially the countries of Western Europe and the institutions of its Union.

It is therefore appropriate that we meet here in Brussels twenty years following the fall of the infamous wall that so long divided Europe. Since then, we recognize that a United Europe has done more to advance democracy than any other region in human history. We hope these ideas and the energy and imagination of Europe will not only serve as a model for the world but will actively assist the community organizers and human rights workers who are at risk throughout the world. They are counting on you.