

**Community of Democracies Non-Governmental Process
Asia Roundtable**

“The Implications of the Financial and
Economic Crisis on Democratic Governance in Asia”

April 30 - May 1, 2009
Jakarta, Indonesia

Recommendations for the Lisbon Ministerial

I. The Community of Democracies and the Financial and Economic Crisis

We express grave concern that this crisis is exacerbating the plight of vulnerable communities around the world, and further recognize how this crisis is a major setback to the Millennium Development Goals. Noting that civil society organizations have been delivering many public services that governments are obliged to provide to their people, we recognize that this crisis increases the competition for resources amongst the public sector, private businesses and civil society organizations.

At the same time, we believe that democracies should be better equipped to cope with such a crisis. Open and participatory government, in which all citizens have a stake, not only allows for clearer accountability for the efforts made by the state, it enables the formation of broader consensus on the sharing of sacrifices and burdens among various sectors. We also note with appreciation the commitments made by CD governments in the Bamako Consensus with regard to the linkages between development and democracy, which are a valuable reference point for governments as they address the current crisis.

We urge all governments to seize this opportunity to address the crisis through democratic means, and in so doing to strengthen the values of democracy. In particular, we urge governments to reaffirm their commitments to the MDGs and direct their economic policy responses to those communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of this crisis, in order to reduce structural inequalities and exclusion.

Thus, Community of Democracies governments should –

Stimulus packages

- Ensure that funds are allocated to those who are most needy and deserving, and that money is spent productively and effectively;
- Commit to providing timely and comprehensive data about stimulus packages to the public, and support the work of civil societies in monitoring the performance of stimulus packages of all countries in the medium and long-term;
- Be vigilant of problems of corruption in the delivery and implementation of stimulus packages, and take action to increase transparency and accountability;
- Open economic decision-making and policymaking to the participation of elected parliaments and civil society organizations;
- Employ a rights-based approach to policy intervention, targeting the fulfillment of economic and social rights, e.g. through employment creation, social safety net

- programs and other social security systems.
- Include agrarian and land reforms to eliminate feudal-like controls of land and resources;
 - Ensure that the measures to addressing economic crisis do not put further strain on the environment.

Global financial architecture / Global finance and trade

- Seek ways to increase the voice of CD in international financial and economic fora (e.g. the International Monetary Fund, G-20, etc.);
- Seek to mediate with bilateral aid agencies and multilateral financial institutions to curtail punitive conditionalities and to promote alignment with the policy priorities of borrowing countries that are arrived at by legitimate, democratic processes.
- Accelerate and expand debt relief for those developing countries that are effectively investing in democratic and economic reforms, including cancellation of all illegitimate debts for the most vulnerable countries.
- Support development of increased transparency of the operations of international financial institutions, notably through more institutionalized civil society participation at all levels.

Civil society

- Refrain from encroaching on the space of civil society, whether financially or politically, mindful of their commitments under paragraphs 42-45 of the Bamako Consensus;
- Examine the impact of their tax policies on the financing of civil society, in order to ensure an enabling tax environment for civil society organizations.
- Ensure that adequate funding for civil society organizations, both through democracy assistance budgets and general overseas aid budgets, is preserved.

Labor

- Ensure that their treatment of labor, including workers who have lost jobs as a result of the crisis, uphold human and labor rights.
- Take particular care to protect the rights of migrant workers, who in addition to losing their jobs may be subject to repatriation and other dislocations.
- Recalling International Labour Organization Convention No. 98, take necessary steps to strengthening collective bargaining systems, not only in workplaces but also at industrial and national levels, to ensure that employers and workers are sharing the burden of the economic crises fairly.

II. Strengthening the Effectiveness of the Community of Democracies

The Community of Democracies represents the aspirations of all peoples to be able to govern themselves in freedom. However, further work is needed to raise global awareness of the CD and enhance its impact at global, regional, and national levels. In particular, the developing partnership of democratic governments and civil society, which is one of the unique strengths of the CD, should be encouraged in all CD-related activities at all levels.

The CD needs to also begin delivering concrete results for its participating countries, according to the principles and goals set down in the Warsaw Declaration, Seoul Plan of Action, Santiago Commitments, and Bamako Consensus documents. These priorities have by no means ceased to exist as a result of the crisis; on the contrary, the need to reaffirm basic democratic principles and to enhance the effectiveness of democratic governance is all the more urgent.

One area where the CD could play a crucial role is in civic education, which is essential in the promotion and consolidation of democracy, and even more salient at this time of worsening economic crisis and socio-political unrest. Another area as yet not sufficiently addressed by the CD is the role of political parties, which are crucial institutions for the functioning of all democracies.

Thus, Community of Democracies governments should –

Articulating the Role of the CD

- Relaunch the process, as the organization enters its tenth year, for example by formulating a long-range plan for the future goals of the organization
- Raise the level of representation at all CD meetings, up to and including heads of state where possible.
- Further enhance the role of the Permanent Secretariat, in particular by institutionalizing a civil society presence within it.
- Launch a global campaign to promote awareness of the “International Day of Democracy” (September 15), as a symbolic focal point for the CD.
- Produce a periodic or annual report on “State of Democracy” worldwide, which would help indicate priority areas for programmatic work, as well as provide benchmarks for countries hoping to join the CD process.
- Strengthen the work of the UN Democracy Caucus, through more regular meetings and consultations, especially with regards to the Human Rights Council and other agenda items related to democracy.
- Revitalize the Working Group process, building on the experience of the original four Working Groups established in Santiago. In particular, Working Groups should have clear objectives established in consultation with the Non-governmental Process, and they should meet more regularly with civil society participation.
- Send CD missions to countries at critical stages in transition processes or which are facing major threats to democracy.
- Launch programs of assistance to countries in transition, which might include capacity-building, specialized aid packages, citizens’ empowerment, etc., in keeping with paragraphs 66-68 of the Bamako Consensus.

Developing CD Programs at the Regional Level

- Meet as regional caucuses of CD governments at regular intervals. In particular, the Asian CD governments should meet amongst themselves on the sidelines of Lisbon or beforehand, if possible facilitated by the Government of Portugal.
- Among other topics for regional caucuses, consider the establishment of regional working groups on specific topics of concern. In Asia, for example, workshops might be created on participation of women and minorities, free and fair elections, and the role of the media.
- Convene meetings of regional organizations to discuss establishment of regional

mechanisms for democracy and human rights. In particular, since the Asian region still lacks a regional democracy or human rights charter, other regions should share their experiences in this regard. As a first step, the CD should coordinate a mission from related bodies of the Organization of American States, African Union, and the Council of Europe to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which is in the process of implementing its commitment to establish a Human Rights Mechanism.

- Encourage governments and intergovernmental organizations in each region to strengthen partnership and cooperation with regional CSO networks on sectors of common concern (in Asia these include, e.g. SAPA, ACSC, SEAPA, WFDA, GPPAC, APSOC, People's SAARC, etc.)

Strengthening National Implementation of CD Resolutions

- Establish a "NGO Forum for Democracy" in all those countries which do not yet have one, in order to serve as a partner for carrying out CD-related activities.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring implementation of CD agreements, both within governments and in partnership with national civil societies.
- Support projects for the training of diplomats in democracy-related activities.

Promoting Civic Education

- Pay priority attention to the implementation of the Global Strategic Plan for Democracy Education, as acknowledged in paragraph 43 of the Bamako Consensus.
- Mandate the Permanent Secretariat of the CD to prepare a concrete, detailed program to implement the strategic plan at national, regional, and global levels.
- Allocate funds to support the implementation of the plan, and create a follow-up mechanism to evaluate the progress of the implementation of the strategic plan.
- Support institutionalized participation of diverse groups of youth in the implementation of the plan, as well as in CD processes in general, in order to increase their understanding of international democracy solidarity efforts. Such participation should make use of new information and communication technologies.
- Ensure that democracy education includes:
 - Effective and appropriate civic education through formal and informal education for people of all ages
 - Public accountability of media
 - Building the capacity of average citizens to understand public policy, especially on economic and financial issues, and to hold relevant parties accountable.

Political Parties

- Engage political parties directly at all levels of CD activity, in order to encourage them to uphold the principles of the CD.
- Articulate basic principles for democratic political parties, including internal party democracy, encouragement of women's participation in party offices, democratic systems for nomination of candidates, and transparency of political party financing.
- Support professional training programs for party and legislative staff, at national and local levels, to enhance their capacity, particularly in legislating on social and economic issues.