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International Experts Panel Releases Recommendations on Invitations to Community of Democracies Ministerial in Lisbon

Democratic backsliding and improvements noted in over a dozen countries

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For information
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Washington, D.C. - An international high-level group of experts has released recommendations on which governments should be invited to participate in the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies (CD) in Lisbon, Portugal on July 10-11.

The group, known as the International Advisory Committee (IAC) of the Community of Democracies Invitations Process,¹ presented their recommendations at a meeting of the 17-member Convening Group² of the Community of Democracies held April 21 at the Embassy of Portugal in Washington, D.C.

The Community of Democracies, a global grouping of democratic and democratizing states, was formed in Warsaw, Poland in 2000 as a forum for strengthening international cooperation for democracy and human rights promotion. In 2007, the IAC was formed to provide objective analysis to the Convening Group on governments' adherence to the CD's criteria for participation.

"We were pleased to accept the request by the Government of Portugal to provide advice on which governments merit an invitation based on their respect for democratic practices and principles," said Cesar Gaviria, IAC member and former President of the Republic of Colombia. "We look forward to the Convening Group's serious consideration of these recommendations."

This year, the IAC studied 34 countries in which democracy and human rights trends appeared to have changed sufficiently over the last two years since the ministerial gathering in Bamako, Mali. For all other countries, the IAC reaffirmed their recommendations from 2007.³ This included a recommendation to not invite **Russia, Iraq, and Azerbaijan.**

¹ Members of the International Advisory Committee include Genaro Arriagada (Chile), E. Gyimah Boadi (Ghana), César Gaviria (Colombia), Morton Halperin (United States), Josef Janning (Germany), Hong-koo Lee (Republic of Korea), António Mascarenhas Monteiro (Cape Verde), Ted Piccone (United States), Nadezhda Mihailova (Bulgaria), and Mark Palmer (United States).

² The 17 members of the Convening Group are: Cape Verde, Chile, Czech Republic, El Salvador, India, Italy, Lithuania, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal (Chair), Republic of Korea, South Africa and United States of America.

³ These recommendations can be seen at http://www.demcoalition.org/site09-2008/2005_html/commu_cdm07.html

The IAC recommended that **Jordan, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Nicaragua, and Sri Lanka** – all of whose governments attended the Bamako Ministerial in 2007 – not be invited to the Lisbon meeting due to the lack of progress on reforms or democratic backsliding in these countries. The committee further noted backsliding in **Algeria, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, and Venezuela** and advised that these governments also not be invited to participate.

The IAC did note positive trends in a handful of countries, recommending that invitations be extended to the governments of **Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Thailand** to participate as observers in the upcoming meeting. However, in its presentation to the Convening Group, the IAC noted concerns about a recent agreement between the Pakistani government and tribal authorities that is likely to negatively affect respect for human rights and democratic practices.

“The observer category should be reserved for countries that do not meet the criteria for participation but are demonstrating continuing progress on democratic development,” said Josef Janning, IAC member and Senior Director of the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany. “It should not be considered a permanent category, but rather for those countries moving forward.”

Notably, no new countries were identified by the IAC as demonstrating sufficient improvement to merit an upgrade to full participant status in the Community.

The committee also noted that several countries deserved close monitoring due to instability or a volatile political situation, including **Colombia, Ecuador, Malawi, Lebanon and Moldova**. In addition, the IAC encouraged the Convening Group to send letters of concern to Colombia, Lebanon, and Moldova, as well as **Georgia, Kenya, and Burundi** expressing concerns about the weakening adherence to the Community of Democracies’ criteria for participation.

The final decision on invitations is expected to be made by the Convening Group in May.

The IAC is an international, independent, high-level body of experts established to strengthen and improve the Community of Democracies by bringing credibility, legitimacy and transparency to its invitation process. The IAC's work is supported by a Secretariat convened by the Democracy Coalition Project and including the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and Freedom House.

For more information and to view the recommendations and full reports on the countries studied, please visit <http://www.demcoalition.org>.

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