



As Prepared for Delivery

It's a distinct honor to be here among those of you who have done so much to advance democratic values.

Let me express my special thanks to World Forum for Democratization in Asia and our friends of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy for making this important gathering possible. I would also thank the people and Government of Indonesia for serving as a model for how democracy can take root and to thank the government of Indonesia for agreeing to serve as host for the next conference of the World Movement for Democracy.

Thanks also to our Indonesian hosts Yappika (the Civil Society Alliance for Democracy). As the leaders of civil society in Indonesia you have played an impressive role in contributing to the building of democracy about which Indonesia is justly proud.

Let me say I am here as the head of my own NGO the Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD) but also as representative of the Secretariat of the International Steering Committee of the CD a network of NGOs from around the world.

There was a time not so long ago when there was a broad consensus among political thinkers. They agreed that democracy was a Western value. They declared that it could only succeed in countries with a Christian heritage. They argued that democracy was a luxury that only rich countries could afford. Indonesia is one vibrant example of how wrong they were. Indonesia, India, Korea, Mali, South Africa, Chile, Senegal, Taiwan, Turkey, Ghana and Tanzania among many others serve as examples of the universal aspiration among people everywhere to live by the values of democracy and construct democratic institutions that reflect their own history and culture.

We have come to understand that democracy is at the same time a universal value and a reflection of how specific cultures adapt those values in creating a unique set of institutions.

I would like to begin my remarks by paying tribute to a very special group of people: you, the representatives of civil society of Asia. Some of you come from dynamic democracies. You work to sustain and perfect those democracies, a job that as an American I know is never ending. Those of you from established democracies serve as a model for others and have many valuable ideas and experiences to share. Those ideas relate to the core ingredients of democracy. They include the conduct of free and fair elections, but we all know that elections alone are not enough to assure democracy. Established democracies must also share ideas about institutions that establish rule of law and representative government, local government which provides democracy at the grass roots, protection of civil society, tolerance of minorities, protection of the rights of women, freedom of the press and of expression and so many other institutional protections needed to assure for democratic governance.

Others of you come from societies in the midst of difficult transitions that are carrying you from authoritarian rule to democracy. You are making history by designing new institutions, institutions that will assist your people in attaining their dreams of a future in which their voices will be heard in the councils where decisions are made.

Still others of you are from authoritarian societies where you confront a ruling party, a dictator or a military clique that cling to power. That was the case in places like South Africa, throughout Eastern and Central Europe, and in Latin America not too many years ago. Those authoritarian regimes that seemed so permanent are now consigned to the dust-bin of history.

Over the decades I recall policy makers and political analysts proclaiming that democracy would never be possible in such places. Why? Because the obstacles were too great, the rulers too entrenched, the culture not receptive. Their pessimism has been proven wrong. Representatives of civil society like you are responsible for proving them wrong. Those experts failed to take into account the power of the most potent idea of our time, the idea of democracy. So I pay tribute to all of you, who work, sometimes against heavy odds, for your courage and tenacity and for your vision in striving for give people everywhere the greatest of gifts, the gift of freedom.

In the case of my own country, the United States, I don't have to remind you that we have experienced the historic election of President Barack Obama. I believe that electoral process has resulted in the most important revitalization of America's democratic institutions in my lifetime.

I am acutely aware that President Obama spent a portion of his youth here in Indonesia, an experience that provided him with important cultural perspectives. And it is no accident that because of that tie Hillary Clinton included Jakarta on her first visit abroad as Secretary of State. She observed that President Obama's formative years in Indonesia: "gave him an insight into not only this diverse and vibrant culture, but also the capacity for people with different backgrounds to live harmoniously together,"

I would note that Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa recently appealed to President Obama to provide leadership on the issue of Burma. In his appeal he recalled that:

*My sister Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the heroic and beloved leader of the Burmese democracy movement, remains under house arrest and cannot speak to the world. In recent months, hundreds of prominent activists, Buddhist monks and nuns, journalists, labor activists and bloggers who want the world to maintain pressure on their government have been sentenced to years, even decades in isolated jungle prisons.*

He urged that "this repression (not) be rewarded" and said "the voices of those (the regime) has sentenced must be heard as if the walls of their jails did not exist."

So I ask you: let us together make sure their voices are heard. And let us not cease to listen to the voices of their counterparts in Vietnam, Singapore and China among others as well as those from Zimbabwe and Sudan.

What makes this gathering so special, so important, in my estimation, is the fact that we have come together to share experiences and to join together in a common cause, not just as nationals of our own countries, but in our capacity as democrats. We have learned that when democracy comes to one country and works well there, the people of other countries begin to ask: “why not us?” They begin to wonder: “if they can do it, why can’t we?” And they also ask: “if they did it, how was it done?” So we have learned the importance of networking which allows us to learn from each other. And so it is that by coming together in Jakarta the ideas we share about what happened in one country may illuminate and inspire those elsewhere.

That brings me to a potentially powerful instrument for assisting us in that work, the Community of Democracies. Let me share with you my overview of the Community of Democracies and the role of nongovernmental organizations in it as we prepare for its Fifth Ministerial to be held in Lisbon, Portugal from July 10-11.

Let me answer the question: what is the CD and why it does it matter to the people in this room?

Nine years ago, the Foreign Ministers of more than a hundred democracies came together in Warsaw, Poland. It was the first such gathering of democracies in history. Together they drafted and signed a document which is at the foundation of the Community, the Warsaw Declaration. Their commitment was to support the idea of democracy, provide mutual support for existing democratic regimes and assist with the transition to democracy of new democracies.

The uniqueness of that gathering was not only that it produced a compact between governments but it also launched a partnership between governments and civil society which is recognized as being at the very heart of democracy.

Today, representing civil society in the Community of Democracies is a body of more than 20 NGOs that has come together from all world regions, the International Steering Committee or ISC/CD. What we are building with the ISC, and this is very much a work in progress, is a global network of NGO networks. We hope that many of you as individuals and organizations will contribute to that network especially since Asia has been such a dynamic part of it. We have forged a partnership with governments that has made the Community of Democracies a unique institution.

Let me take this occasion to review the accomplishments of the nongovernmental part of the CD. What we have succeeded in doing is playing an advisory role to governments on a broad range of issues and we have influenced their actions. Here are some examples. We have:

1. Launched a major initiative to promote education for democracy worldwide;
2. Proposed the establishment of a United Nations Democracy Fund, UNDEF designed to support efforts of NGOs like yours;
3. Introduced an initiative for the training of diplomats in support of democracy activists through our Diplomat’s Handbook for Democracy Development Support;
4. Advocated the establishment of a Permanent CD Secretariat which has been launched in Warsaw and with which we look forward to working;

5. Proposed a major CD initiative on establishing a global exchange program to support democracy.
6. Issued regular statements on threats to democracy;
7. Supported the creation of the International Centre for Democracy Transition, established in Budapest, Hungary designed to assist with democratic transitions;
8. Encouraged the creation of a viable United Nations Democracy Caucus;
9. Participated regularly in meetings of the CD Convening Group and in the Ministerial meetings of the CD held biennially and annually at the United Nations;
10. Proposed wide ranging reforms designed to make the Community of Democracies more effective.

As a global civil society network devoted to democracy support and promotion we are only credible institution on the world stage that can truly reflect the aspirations of people at the grassroots on issues of democracy. That is why we need you and why we need your ideas. I expect to leave Jakarta with a sense of what it is you believe needs to be done in this region, at this time of global economic crisis to advance democracy. If I can properly capture the views of this workshop we will share those views with the ISC and try to integrate them into the Lisbon Declaration which we expect to help draft.

I hope many of you will be able to attend the Lisbon ministerial. I am currently working with a variety of donors to seek funding that would allow a number of you to participate in the Lisbon Ministerial in July.

Let me close by thanking you all for what you have done to advance democracy in your countries and in the Asian region. From time to time I like to recall the words of poet John Donne that remind us of why it is that those of us in far-flung parts of the world work together on the same issues. John Donne wrote:

*No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."*

A personal hero of mine, Robert F. Kennedy, reinforced and updated this idea in an address in Cape Town in 1966 during the period of apartheid when he observed:

*Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.*

I look forward to working with you during these two days, but also in the years to come.