

COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES NOT ALONE IN TURNING UNIVERSAL VALUE INTO UNIVERSAL REALITY, SECRETARY-GENERAL TELLS MINISTERIAL MEETING

Following is Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message, as delivered by Roland Rich, Executive Head of the United Nations Democracy Fund, to the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies, in Lisbon, Portugal, being held on 11 and 12 July:

It is highly appropriate that this Ministerial Meeting is held in Lisbon, because as academics tell us, it is on the Iberian Peninsula that the third wave of democratization began some 35 years ago. So it is with deep appreciation that I congratulate Portugal on continuing its leadership role in advancing the values of democracy.

At the turn of the century, not long before the First Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies in Warsaw in 2000, a journalist asked Amartya Sen to reflect on the twentieth century and identify its greatest achievement. Sen's response has become widely known and acclaimed: he said that by the close of the twentieth century, democracy had become a universal value.

Pleasing as that response is, it left much work to be done -- turning this universal value into a universal reality. This is the momentous goal that the Community of Democracies has set for itself. My message to you today is that the Community of Democracies is not alone in these efforts. Many others are working towards the same goal, with the United Nations foremost among them.

At the 2005 World Summit, all the world's Governments:

-- reaffirmed "that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives";

-- stressed "that democracy, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing";

-- and renewed their "commitment to support democracy by strengthening countries' capacities to implement the principles and practices of democracy and resolve to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to assist Member States".

The United Nations has been active in fulfilling the ambitious mandate established by the World Summit. Whether it is assisting executives and parliaments to strengthen democratic governance, building democratic objectives into peacekeeping missions, supporting electoral processes, empowering women, protecting the rights of children, or investing in the voice of civil society -- the United Nations has adopted democracy as an end in itself as well as a means to achieve peace, development and respect for human rights.

It is natural to focus on the term “democracy” in the title of your organization, but it is also important to give some thought to the term “community”. On consulting the thesaurus, three synonyms stand out.

One is “identity”, and it is significant that the members of this community identify with each other, not on the basis of language, religion, proximity or ideology, but on the basis of a common value. It is therefore a community open to all who share that value.

Another synonym is “cooperation”, and it is also highly significant that this community sees its principal goal as cooperating together to achieve its shared value.

The third synonym is “convergence”, and the ideal of this Community is together to strengthen the practice and quality of democracy.

These goals and ideals give our two institutions a great deal of common ground. I commend all of you for your commitment to them, and wish you a most productive conference.