



## **Civil Society Recommendations to the Vilnius Ministerial of the Community of Democracies**

Presented by the nongovernmental International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies (ISC/CD)

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From 2010-11, the Council for a Community of Democracies organized five regional civil society consultations to identify priorities and recommendations for strengthening democracy. Meetings in Pretoria, South Africa; Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Doha, Qatar; Rosario, Argentina; and Brussels, Belgium focused on strategies for democracy support worldwide and targeted many of their recommendations at the themes of the Working Groups under the Lithuanian Presidency of the CD. As developments in the Middle East and North Africa were the subject of two meetings, in Doha and in Brussels, a special section has been included on strategies for supporting these developments. Together, these meetings brought together over 200 participants from nearly 70 countries to identify key opportunities for supporting democratic development worldwide.

A feature of these roundtables was the understanding that the CD was undergoing a process of reform that could make it more effective and able to act on recommendations such as these. The ISC/CD remains committed to working in partnership with the governments of the CD to support democratic development, and it asks that the reform package include an explicit role for civil society in the Community of Democracies as defined by the ISC/CD.

The following compilation of recommendations represents the most concrete, actionable proposals to emerge from this dialogue, and the nongovernmental International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies urges the governments at the Vilnius Ministerial to review these recommendations carefully and take appropriate action:

### **Recommendations on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society**

1. Assure that a “State of Civil Society” report be made at biennial Ministerial meetings to discuss the challenges facing civil society around the world. The ISC/CD, working with other NGOs, would prepare this report, highlighting the central role that civil society plays in the democratic process and specifically in the work of the CD. The results of this process should be disseminated widely by CD participants.
2. Endorse and implement the recommendations in the Defending Civil Society report of the World Movement for Democracy; the CD should establish a committee to monitor violations of these principles around the world, and it should support the development of an early warning mechanism for defending civil society through the study of trends of political and legislative changes and alerting appropriate actors regarding the development of restrictive legislation.
3. Increase assistance for civil society organizations as part of efforts to protect and enhance public space for citizens to engage in activities to advance democratic principles. Grant application processes should be simplified to avoid restricting the pool of applicants to only the best-connected organizations, especially when, in many countries, new potential partners are emerging in civil society.
4. Provide funding for capacity-building initiatives for civil society organizations, including support for website design and access to the internet, fundraising, budgeting and personnel, governance, accountability and other needs. Support for initiatives that aid civil society in analyzing legal frameworks and responding to restrictive legal environments should also be provided.
5. Facilitate forums for discussion between civil society groups and their respective national governments to combat mistrust and build constructive relations.

6. Identify civil society activists to be awarded Democracy Tributes for their work in challenging environments. Raising the profile of these activists will encourage others facing similar challenges and demonstrate solidarity between members of democratic countries and those striving to transform their own countries and communities.
7. Encourage individual CD states in different regions to develop national funding mechanisms to address emerging threats to civil society and share best practices for making such support available and effective.
8. Eliminate restrictions on the right of association and simplify policies governing the registration and access to resources for civil society organizations.

### **Recommendations on Democracy Education**

9. Establish a Working Group for Democracy Education under the Mongolian Presidency, which should review and implement the Global Strategic Plan for Democracy Education, developed by the ISC/CD and endorsed at the 2007 Bamako Ministerial, and seek passage of a United Nations resolution on Democracy Education.
10. Integrate democracy education into teacher training curricula with an emphasis on combining academic or classroom learning with experiential learning to make a more lasting impact on students.
11. Encourage CD countries to work with civil society on the development of exchange programs designed to strengthen democratic institutions in other countries.
12. Promote youth participation in democratic processes, both on a national basis and within the CD, to ensure the future of democracy. Women and minorities should also be given special attention when providing education and training on democracy.
13. Assist in opening democratic public spaces, especially at local levels, to build citizens' participatory skills and deliberation capacity. Such activities do not have to be political in nature, but can include free speech forums, community events, street plays, and other creative forms of democracy education.
14. Make democracy education a mainstream priority in assistance programs. Mainstreaming democracy education into foreign aid and development programs, through agencies like the UN Democracy Fund and the UN Development Program, and increasing direct support for civil society in the field of democracy education will signal a greater commitment to democracy education as an essential tool in democratic consolidation.

### **Recommendations on Poverty, Development and Democracy**

15. Emphasize capacity building in development assistance programs, targeting education and training, economic empowerment and other capacity-building initiatives that are best-placed to enhance the democratic nature of the community and promote more equitable outcomes.
16. Build conditionality into development assistance programs to require recipient governments to demonstrate that they are utilizing this assistance transparently, responsibly and equitably. As the participation of citizens in public policy implementation is the best method for ensuring this outcome, CD countries should include democracy as a consideration and condition in determining the allocation of development assistance.
17. Involve civil society organizations in the planning and monitoring of development assistance programs, identifying strategies for strengthening the capacity of local civil society organizations to evaluate the economic, social and environmental impact of these programs.

18. Support initiatives that strengthen grassroots democracy, ensuring regular local government elections, as this is the basis for a strong democratic system and people's participation in development.
19. Encourage CD governments to seek opportunities to work with businesses and other private sector entities to develop cooperative strategies for supporting principles of democracy and human rights as part of ethical business practices, which improve the business climate in a given country and contribute to overall social and economic development.
20. Promote transparency in the financing of political parties and support legal and political changes that allow greater participation and lessen the influence of large donors.

### **Recommendations on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**

21. Launch a public website through the CD Permanent Secretariat as a global resource for methods and strategies for advancing women's rights. This should include a mapping of women's collective strategies in different countries and information on activist organizations that serve to build political leadership and advocacy capacity of women leaders, especially at the local level.
22. Identify and promote strategies for increasing women's political participation and empowerment at all levels of government, including follow-up on the leadership training proposed by the Working Group; focusing on gender issues as a component of poverty reduction and education policies; and ensuring equitable participation in policymaking at all levels, including the budgetary level.
23. Focus on increasing opportunities for women's participation in all aspects of society, including economic development, business activity and civic participation, to provide women a greater stake in and influence on the development of these processes.
24. Develop a global plan on gender equality that includes the need for quota laws regarding women's participation in politics, laws against gender violence, access to sexual and reproductive health services, citizen participation and access to education.

### **Recommendations on Regional Cooperation**

25. Encourage the ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and support civil society in the development of regional charters in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa that identify standards for democratic governance in the regions.
26. Include regional democracy and human rights bodies in CD activities, including appropriate bodies from the Organization of American States, the African Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation and the European Union. Working Group chairs should consider issuing invitations to representatives of these organizations to strengthen regional activities and broaden the constituency of the CD.
27. Form regional CD caucuses to include governments and civil society organizations from each region, allowing more regular interaction on substantive issues within the region.
28. Support the inclusion of civil society in regional and interregional mechanisms in which CD members participate.
29. Facilitate the development of regional networks of democracy activists, paying special attention to involvement of youth, women and other social groups.

## **Recommendations on Promoting Democracy and Responding to National and Transnational Threats to Democracy**

30. Revitalize the United Nations Democracy Caucus both in New York and Geneva with sustained activities to make it more effective. Concerted action on issues relevant to democracy and human rights, in which democracies often have shared values and interests, should be sought.
31. Promote freedom of the press by providing support for media training and media advocacy organizations, monitoring the development of legislation impacting press freedom, and encouraging the establishment of nongovernmental media structures in countries where state-owned media are dominant. Journalists are facing threats to their lives in several countries, so democratic countries must take strong measures to protect the lives of journalists.
32. Improve transparency and promote the freedom of information between governments and publics to provide media and other NGO groups the ability to access information about government actions.
33. Monitor developments in established democracies that threaten to undermine established standards for democracy and human rights, empowering civil society to hold governments accountable for these policies.
34. Incorporate internet freedom as a significant focus of the CD, including advocacy for greater access to the internet as well as training for democracy activists on effective uses of new technology and social media to disseminate democratic ideas.

## **Recommendations on Supporting the Democratic Process in the Middle East and North Africa**

35. Provide clear, consistent and uncompromising political support to the democratic movements in the region. Any hesitation or hedging provides anti-democratic forces an opening to crack down on these movements, likely with violence. Democratic countries should clearly state that they stand ready to support democrats with technical, political, strategic and moral support if requested. Governments must not continue policies that place them in partnership with dictators and prevent the development of democracy.
36. Support an inclusive democratic process, not individual actors. Democratic governments should not seek to exclude Islamist parties from the debate and should allow the people of the countries to determine the political outcome in an open, transparent environment.
37. Provide short-term, economic support to Tunisia and Egypt to prevent an economic crisis while democratic constitutions and elections are being organized. Both countries have the potential to be economically viable beyond the short-term, but the dramatic impact of the revolutions has severely weakened their economies for the immediate future.
38. Guarantee sufficient resources and personnel for a robust election monitoring process in Tunisia and Egypt.
39. Include a focus on civil society and political parties in efforts to support democracy in the region. The removal of constraints on the activities of civil society means new voices are now able to contribute to the civic dialogue, and political parties connected to the needs of the people will improve the likelihood of a sustainable democratic outcome.
40. Promote the Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support, now available in Arabic, to diplomats of democratic countries posted in the Middle East and North Africa region.