

February 24, 2005

To: Foreign Minister Ignacio Walker, Chile

Cc: Foreign Ministers of the Community of Democracies Convening Group
Convening Group Permanent Representatives in NY and Geneva
Convening Group Ambassadors in DC

We write to you as members of an international coalition that supports the work of a strong and effective United Nations Democracy Caucus. We are encouraged that in the last year, under the leadership of Chile and the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies, there has been frequent consultation within the UN Democracy Caucus and that the Caucus convened both at the 2004 General Assembly and in Geneva during the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

The April 2005 ministerial conference of the Community of Democracies (CD) in Santiago is approaching, and the UN Democracy Caucus is a key agenda item. The credibility of the entire CD process makes it essential that the preparatory work of the Caucus and its first steps should now begin to bear fruit in the form of specific accomplishments and actions.

We believe there is no more important arena for the expression and realization of the values of the UN Democracy Caucus than the upcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). Central to the realization of that promise is the development of a focused and clear agenda supported by the Caucus.

We are concerned that some countries in the international community have launched an effort to oppose debate and voting on country-specific resolutions at the UNCHR and UN General Assembly. Such an approach, which historically has been advanced by the world's tyrannies, would be injurious to the cause of global human rights and to the credibility of the UN rights monitoring system, which already is suffering from a deep crisis of credibility. It is difficult to imagine the advancement and enforcement of human rights if the UN Commission cannot be a forum in which the human rights abuses taking place in specific countries are examined and the gross violations of these rights are unequivocally and individually condemned. For this reason we urge the UN Democracy Caucus Convening Group to take the lead in explicitly rejecting this effort to weaken the UNCHR and the whole UN human rights system.

Indeed, we call upon the Caucus to take the lead in identifying key issues and areas of concern by ensuring that some of the world's worst rights violations are fully aired, examined, and forthrightly censured. Among the areas we believe deserve inclusion in this list of the world's most urgent areas of the gravest human rights violations are:

- Sudan's Darfur region, where tens of thousands of innocent civilians have been killed in the last two years;

- Myanmar/Burma, which has denied its people their democratic rights and civil liberties and has continued to detain political prisoners such as Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi;
- Saudi Arabia, which suppresses women's rights and places severe restrictions on the religious practice of Shia and the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities;
- North Korea, where a totalitarian state continues to massively oppress its citizens and hold hundreds of thousands of people in labor camps under inhumane conditions.
- Cuba, where opposition non-violent pro-democracy civic groups, political movements, and independent journalists are harassed and imprisoned for the expression of their views.

We also urge the UNDC to place specific focus on countries that in the last year have seen significant violations of political rights and democratic practices. These include:

- Uzbekistan, a country where torture of non-violent political activists and numerous deaths of prisoners while under incarceration is a widespread problem;
- Kazakhstan, which placed restrictions on open and competitive elections, including the banning of the Democratic Choice Party;
- Belarus, where opposition leader Mikhail Marinich has been sentenced to a five year prison term and the leaders of other democratic political opposition parties and groups have been arrested or have disappeared and are presumed dead;
- Zimbabwe, where upcoming legislative elections are threatened by censorship and intimidation of the media and severe restrictions against democratic opposition parties and NGOs;
- Iran, where anti-democratic actions have included the suppression of opposition newspapers, harassment and intimidation of opposition political parties and activists, and the banning of numerous liberal candidates in the 2004 Parliamentary elections;
- Nepal, where democratic rights have been suspended by the King.

We recognize the grave threat to human rights posed by terrorism. At the same time we believe counter-terrorism efforts should be monitored to ensure that they do not lead to or justify gross human rights violations. In this regard we believe it is important to extend the one-year mandate for monitoring of counter-terrorism efforts that was established 2004 under the sponsorship of Mexico.

In addition to addressing these key issues in Geneva, we ask the UNDC Convening Group and the entire membership to take a lead in rejecting the idea of universal membership in the UN Commission on Human Rights. This proposal would increase the likelihood of "no action" on country specific motions and create an unmanageable Commission where serious discussion would be even more difficult than is the case today. Instead, we believe it is essential for states that respect democracy and human rights to actively seek places on the Commission, and we urge the Convening Group and other concerned democracies to work in a concerted fashion in the regional blocs and at the ECOSOC to encourage their nominations and vote for each other. Similarly,

membership of the Democracy Caucus itself must be limited only to those states invited as participants to the CD Ministerial meeting in Santiago.

We further request that the UN Democracy Caucus Convening Group allow a presentation by our coalition at its meeting in Geneva. Such an exchange of views would ensure enhanced transparency of the UN Democracy Caucus process, contribute to an open exchange of views among civil society actors, and build on the precedent that already has been established in the Community of Democracies process.

We thank you for your consideration of these requests and hope that under Chile's leadership, the Convening Group will undertake these important actions and strengthen the broader principle of international cooperation among the democracies.

We hope to hear from you soon on the issues and proposals contained in this communication, and we hope that some of the proposals we have made will become an integral part of the UN Democracy Caucus's positions in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Emma Bonino, Member of the European Parliament

Charles J. Brown, President, Citizens for Global Solutions

Louise Kantrow, Executive Director, International League for Human Rights

Hillel Neuer, Executive Director, United Nations Watch

Marco Pannella, Member of the European Parliament

Theodore Piccone, Executive Director, Democracy Coalition Project

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch

Richard C. Rowson, President, Council for a Community of Democracies

Sergio Stanzani, President of the Transnational Radical Party

Jennifer L. Windsor, Executive Director, Freedom House