



**DEMOCRACY
COALITION
PROJECT**



**Transnational
Radical Party**

PRESS RELEASE

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NGO Coalition Urges UN Democracy Caucus to Ensure Strong Membership Mechanism for Proposed Human Rights Council

February 20, 2006 -- The Democracy Coalition Project, Freedom House and the Transnational Radical Party are calling on the 16-member Convening Group of the Community of Democracies to lead efforts for successful reform of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Specifically, the organizations urged the Community's UN Democracy Caucus to ensure a strong Human Rights Council by supporting an improved membership mechanism, including criteria that member states abide by the highest standards of human rights and elections to the body by an individual and direct vote of two-thirds of the General Assembly.

"The UN Democracy Caucus has a special responsibility to lead the global effort to promote the values of human rights and democracy enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Warsaw Declaration," said Matteo Mecacci, the Transnational Radical Party's representative to the UN.

The Human Rights Council is being established to replace the Commission on Human Rights, an institution that critics say has lost its credibility in protecting human rights. Negotiations on the structure and functions of the new Council are reaching a critical stage and key elements are still under debate among member states. President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson will present a new draft resolution for consideration by member states next week.

"With so much of the final text for the Council still in dispute, it is absolutely vital that the Caucus' leaders weigh in now and insist on a new and improved human rights body," urged Jennifer Windsor, Executive Director of Freedom House.

In addition to strengthened membership procedures, the letter calls for support of a regular meeting schedule of up to 12 weeks a year so that the Council can fulfill its mandate on a year-round basis, rather than one six-week session, as well as procedures to suspend members who are found to be in serious violation of their human rights obligations.

“If the Human Rights Council is to be an effective promoter of human rights, election to the Council must become more selective by holding members to the highest standards of human rights,” said Ted Piccone, Executive Director of the Democracy Coalition Project. “Democratic governments have a key role to play in building on the UN’s record in protecting human rights.”

The Community of Democracies was founded in 2000 when over 100 nations met in Warsaw, Poland and committed themselves to working together to promote democracy and human rights around the world. For more information on the Campaign for a UN Democracy Caucus, visit www.democracycaucus.net.

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