

**Presentation by Claudia Caldeirinha**

**Regional Director for Europe, Democracy Coalition Project**

**to the Conference on "Enhancing Democratic Cooperation at the UN:**

**Building Common Purpose among the UN's democracies"**

**Held at the UN Commission for Human Rights, Geneva, April 9, 2003.**

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen for your participation in this roundtable discussion.

**Democracy Coalition Project**

DCP was originally an initiative of the Open Society Institute and it is presently an independent global NGO working in civil society coalition-building and in the promotion and monitoring of the CD process. It cooperates with -governmental and non-governmental -partners world-wide to advance the democratic agenda at different levels. DCP helped to organise the Community of Democracies Seoul Non-Governmental Forum with the Sejong Institute of Korea, Freedom House and other non-governmental groups. It has also organised conferences and events connected with the CD in several regions, and has recently published Defending Democracy, the first-ever comparative survey evaluating how some 40 governments promoted democracy beyond their borders. Presently, DCP is working with governments and NGOs to follow-up on action items adopted at the Seoul meetings and to promote a set of pro-democracy outcomes at the next CD Conference in Santiago in 2005.

**Community of Democracies - some facts & figures**

The Community of Democracies, as many of you know, is an association of nations from all regions of the world that share a commitment to building and strengthening democracy in their own countries, regions and globally. The CD held its first ministerial conference in June 2000 in **Warsaw**, where over 100 nations endorsed the Warsaw Declaration pledging to support democratic principles and practices. In his address, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the CD as an important contribution to the UN's own goals of the advancement of human rights and the world-wide spread of democracy. The CD is coordinated by a "Convening Group" comprised of 10 countries: Chile, the current chair, the Czech Republic, India, South Korea, Mali, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, and the United States.

**In November 2002**, at the CD's Second Ministerial Conference in **Korea**, 94 governments endorsed the **Seoul Plan of Action**, in which they made commitments to deepen cooperation to

strengthen democracy, for example by developing regional human rights and democracy monitoring mechanisms, increasing assistance to emerging democracies, taking steps to prevent or respond to crises in democratic governance, and expanding consultation with civil society. The Convening Group was formally endorsed as the body responsible for leading implementation of the Seoul Plan of Action and reporting to the next governmental conference in Chile.

Importantly, leading up to the Seoul meeting, the CD's Convening Group adopted a set of **"Criteria for Participation and Procedures"** that establishes guidelines for the participation of States and international organisations in CD meetings, and creates an "observer" status for democracies facing problems or countries in transition to democracy. In the Seoul Plan of Action, all participating Governments agreed that the CD "will not include those countries where there is currently a disruption of constitutional rule or severe persistent erosion of or lack of essential elements of democracy." The criteria were applied when deciding the participation in Seoul: some countries were downgraded because of deteriorating conditions (e.g. Egypt and Ukraine) and a few others were welcomed into the Community for the first time (e.g. Ghana, East Timor, etc.). DCP intends to play an active role in monitoring the invitation process for the next ministerial meeting, pressing for greater transparency in the process, and encouraging governments to take positive steps to reform in order to qualify for CD participation.

As in Warsaw, the Seoul conference involved a **parallel non-governmental forum of NGOs**, civil society representatives, and prominent individuals from around the world, including activists from many countries that were not invited to participate in the ministerial meeting.

The third global ministerial conference will be held in **Santiago, Chile** in the **beginning of 2005**. Chilean Foreign Minister Soledad Alvear declared she wants to make the CD a truly global process, and has expressed her hope that democratic countries will be more actively engaged.

Another related initiative is being developed by **Romania**, which has offered to host later this year a **European CD regional conference** to assess democratic progress and implementation of the Seoul Action Plan.

### **Community of Democracies and Democracy Caucus**

At the **UN level**, the past decade has witnessed an increased commitment toward promoting democracy around the world. It has also become evident that there is a strong linkage between democracy and other fields where the UN is active, such as peacekeeping, development, and human

rights. In essence, it has been recognized that the fundamental objectives of the UN's work cannot be achieved in today's world without addressing the issue of strengthening democracy.

For this reason, the CD governments have strongly stated their support for the creation of an effective democracy group at this organisation to push a democratic agenda. Secretary General Kofi Annan set the tone for this idea when he stated in Warsaw, "When the United Nations can truly call itself a community of democracies, the Charter's noble ideals of protecting human rights and promoting 'social progress in larger freedoms' will have been brought much closer." The Warsaw Declaration itself states: "We will collaborate on democracy-related issues in existing international and regional institutions, forming coalitions and caucuses to support resolutions and other international activities aimed at the promotion of democratic governance." In Seoul, the Convening Group was charged with "encouraging the formation of coalitions and caucuses to support democracy."

What better place to put this idea into practice than here in Geneva at the UN Commission on Human Rights. The election of a non-democratic country to head this Commission on Human Rights is another testament to the need for more cooperation among democracies at the UN, its regional groups and its constituent bodies, including the General Assembly.

Democratic caucuses should be dedicated to championing an agenda that reflects the shared values and policy commitments of their democratic members. There is every reason for democratic countries to collaborate to promote their common interests to, as stated in the Warsaw Declaration, "create an external environment conducive to democratic development." At a minimum, democracies at the UN should challenge authoritarian governments' efforts to undermine and obstruct progress on democratic reform efforts developed by UN agencies and bodies.

The CD is compatible with and can advance the goals of the UN in the democracy and human rights area. Indeed, the link between these two bodies has already been established. In **September 2000**, the Foreign Ministers of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies met in New York during the UN Millennium Assembly, and jointly declared their intentions to closely link the CD to the United Nations by, inter alia, convening an informal democracy caucus made up of governments endorsing the Warsaw Declaration. The Polish government hosted such an informal democracy caucus meeting at the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly for the purpose of coordinating support for a Romanian resolution on promoting and strengthening democracy. This very good resolution, known as 55/96, was approved at the UNGA by a vote of 145-0 with 14 abstentions.. Notably, the CD Convening Group also endorsed the principle that, in supporting candidates for UN bodies, a country's endorsement of the Warsaw Declaration should be taken into account. The

Community of Democracies has worked very closely with the UNDP and the hosts of the Conferences of New or Restored Democracies, including Romania, Benin and now Mongolia to ensure collaboration and exchanges of ideas. The CG countries have also worked with the **UNDP** to host a forum in March 2001 to discuss greater collaboration among governments and non-governmental organizations on democracy promotion programs.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

In DCP, we view both the creation of a CD and the promotion of greater cooperation among democracies at the UN as being fundamental to strengthening the UN and to advancing the cause of democracy and human rights nationally, regionally and globally.

“Democracy” – as the **UN High Commissioner for HR** Sergio Vieira de Mello affirmed in the opening of the expert seminar on the interdependence between democracy and human rights in November 2002- “remains, for all its imperfections, the best hope for securing human dignity and rights”. However –he argues- a major objective to all countries must be to move beyond narrow notions of democracy to promoting and securing “holistic democracy”, a conception that encompasses the procedural and the substantive, formal institutions and informal processes, majorities and minorities, males and females, Governments and civil society, the political and the economic, the national and the international. This holistic approach is also enshrined in the principles adopted by the Warsaw Declaration.

There are several **means that could be used to pursue these objectives** and we argue that investing in the CD is one of them. Through the Community of Democracies process, a set of international norms is in place, and a mechanism for pushing governments in the right direction is being established. However, to translate these ambitious goals into reality, we believe a deal should be struck: limit membership in the Community of Democracies to governments making demonstrable progress toward respecting the norms of the Warsaw Declaration and of the UN covenants, and in exchange, channel additional resources and benefits to help these societies to stay on the democratic track.

To meet its potential, governments participating in the Community of Democracies must be pressed to take their commitments more seriously. Transnational **networks of civil society** activists need to be brought to the table to channel demands to governments. Through the efforts of DCP and its numerous partners, some of this work has already begun. For instance, at the Nongovernmental Forum in Seoul, dozens of prominent activists and experts endorsed an **Appeal to Governments** to strengthen the Community of Democracies by including as members only those governments that

consistently respect democracy and human rights norms. The Appeal also calls for (i) more transparency, (ii) to linking democratic performance of states to preferential access to multilateral assistance, debt relief and trade privileges; (iii) and for the creation of democracy groups at the United Nations and other bodies. Moreover, it urges the CD to issue warnings and offer assistance when democratic crises erupt and to suspend the participation of countries where human rights are seriously eroding, unless the country at stake is taking concrete steps to improve the situation. It recommends that the CD governments must systematically consult with civil society organizations, political parties and independent experts, especially those groups actively working in the countries under review.

Finally, the appeal advocates effective implementation of the CD plan of action and the creation of a permanent secretariat to carry on its work between ministerial meetings and to monitor country developments, devising collective responses to threats to democracy, and tracking best practices. Collectively, these recommendations constitute a concrete agenda that can be the focus of a series of civil society activities leading up to the next CD meeting in Santiago and beyond. As in the UN, where civil society organisations have become an increasingly important partner, so too the CD should strengthen the cooperation between civil society and member governments and invest in these partnerships to consolidate democracy and human rights norms.

Finally, it is important to remember that in order to consistently promote democracy, democratic states should constantly cultivate a norm consistent behaviour, nationally and internationally. In the words of the famous historian and philosopher **Tzvetan Todorov** “despite the victory of the democratic system over totalitarianism in the previous century, democratic countries should be very attentive not to fall into dangerous degenerations, by not resisting the temptation of considering themselves above the ethical norms they have contributed to implement. The consequences of such a temptation could be enormously negative, especially for democracy itself”. Moreover, as it was argued by the Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in an address to parliamentarians just before the Millennium Summit: "We have, in a number of recent instances, witnessed attempts to cloak the outright subversion of democracy in the mantle of defending it. We have heard governments claim to be acting in the best interests of the people, even when showing contempt for their choices. We must see through these claims. And we must be no less vigilant in condemning those who would overturn democracy in more subtle, yet equally destructive ways".

We want to believe that the countries engaged in the CD will learn from history and recent events, and will live up to the principles they have set for themselves and be models of compliance with

international law and human rights norms, while assisting one another to strengthen their respective democratic systems.

In conclusion, it is our opinion that the Community of Democracies should become a **forum of nations** committed to the universally recognised human rights without which democracy cannot thrive. It should provide a venue to share experiences and to coordinate efforts related to strengthening democratic governance. It should offer a forum for those still struggling in repressive societies to solicit support and to expose the oppression they confront. In addition, the Community of Democracies should operate in very close cooperation with the internationally recognised *fora*, like the UN, and it should build effective coalitions -or democratic groups- within these bodies, so that votes for human rights are won, not lost. It should also help ensure the consistent adoption of the 'standards for participation'; to achieve greater transparency of the convening group and of its internal mechanisms; and to achieve greater interaction with the non-governmental sector.

DCP is convinced that increasing real participation in the CD and investing in cooperation among democracies inside the UN is one powerful way of promoting global democracy - in a multilateral and inclusive way-, freedom, human development and security, bearing in mind and learning from the lessons of history.