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Contact: Ted Piccone
Democracy Coalition Project
(202) 721-5630

Michael Goldfarb
Freedom House
(212) 514-8040 x12

NGO COALITION URGES CREATION OF PERMANENT UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY GROUP

Foreign Ministers From Leading Democracies Meet Friday at UN to Discuss Common Strategies

NEW YORK, September 24, 2003 -- A group of non-governmental organizations that promote democracy and human rights around the world has welcomed a meeting of ten foreign ministers from leading democratic states scheduled for Friday, September 26 at the United Nations in New York.

In a September 23 letter to the foreign ministers, the NGO group -- which includes the International League for Human Rights, the Campaign for UN Reform, the Democracy Coalition Project, Freedom House, the Open Society Institute, Human Rights Watch, the Transnational Radical Party, and the Council for a Community of Democracies -- called on the UN's democratic member states to organize themselves into a permanent working coalition at the world body.

The meeting of foreign ministers of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies has been scheduled for Friday by Chile, the group's chair. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and the foreign ministers of India, Mexico, Mali, South Africa, the Republic of Korea, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Portugal will attend.

The Community of Democracies, created in June 2000, unites over 100 democratically elected governments. It seeks to enhance cooperation among democratic states in global and regional institutions, coordinate efforts to deepen respect for human rights and democracy, and support fragile emerging democracies, particularly those in the developing world. As yet, however, the group has not established a permanent working presence at the UN.

In July, the NGO coalition urged the establishment of a permanent Democracy Group at the United Nations (UNDG) this fall to promote the values of democracy and human rights within the UN system. The UNDG would convene to coordinate actions by member states to strengthen international support for democratic governance. It would also urge the protection of human rights and democratic practices through the UN system and its related agencies.

The NGO coalition also outlined a series of aims for the UN Democracy Group and for the Community of Democracies Convening Group, including:

- A commitment to convene a meeting of the UNDG at the next session of the UN Commission on Human Rights to develop a common agenda of action items that strengthen the implementation and enforcement of fundamental political and civil rights through the United Nations;
- Support for tightening eligibility for membership on the UN Human Rights Commission to states that have demonstrated respect for democracy and human rights;
- A coordinated response to Secretary General Kofi Annan's appeal for additional funding to the UN Electoral Assistance Division;

- Collaboration with the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, currently chaired by the Government of Mongolia; and
- Endorsement of other democracy-related resolutions to be introduced at the current UN General Assembly.

In July, leaders of international NGOs and eminent persons urged Chile's Foreign Minister, Secretary Powell, and other foreign ministers from leading democracies to establish a working coalition of democracies at the UN.

"We are grateful that there has been a favorable response to our call, and we hope that Friday's meeting will lead to the establishment of a caucus of democracies that can work in concert to make the UN an effective voice for political rights and civil liberties," said Adrian Karatnycky, Counselor at Freedom House and coordinator of the ad hoc non-governmental group.

In recent months, the effort to create a Democracy Group at the UN has won the support of leading editorial pages; of governments, including Italy, Poland, Romania and the U.S.; and of the U.S. House of Representatives, which has passed legislation mandating that the State Department work toward establishing a "UN Democracy Caucus."