

DECLARATION OF WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
GOVERNING COUNCIL MINISTERIAL
SEPTEMBER 15, 2017

As agreed at the Ninth Community of Democracies Ministerial Conference.

Reaffirming our commitment to the principles outlined in the Warsaw Declaration, including our determination to work together to promote and strengthen democracy, recognizing that we are at differing stages in our democratic development. We will cooperate to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions, aware that the advancement and consolidation of democracy constitutes the main objective of the Community of Democracies.

Emphasizing the link and interdependence between democracy, human rights and the principle of the rule of law.

Reaffirming our commitment to uphold the values of inclusion, openness and compromise that underpin effective democratic multiparty systems and to promote respect for pluralism, so as to enable societies to retain their multicultural character. We firmly reject ethnic and religious hatred, violence, intolerance and violent extremism.

Further emphasizing that an enabling environment for civil society actors and independent media is an essential component of a sustainable democracy. We underline the importance of continuous support for civil society, including non-governmental organizations, journalists and human rights defenders, for the enjoyment of all human rights, online as well as offline, notably the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, association and peaceful assembly. A competent, independent, and impartial judiciary is essential to promote, protect and uphold these rights.

Strongly denouncing state-sponsored and other forms of terrorism as a grave threat to democratic societies and the values they embrace, international peace and security, as well as to humanity in general, and indeed to the very foundation on which democracies are built.

Recalling the need to protect against threats to democracy, we intend, as members of international or regional organizations, with full respect for international law, to promote, defend, strengthen or help rebuild democratic institutions, remembering the need to prevent or counter violence and threats, including those in cyber space, against democratic government, disruption of constitutional rule or unconstitutional alteration of the democratic order.

Reiterating our resolve to further promote, protect and advance the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by women, a half of humanity, and to promote their economic and political empowerment and representation with emphasis on combating all forms of discrimination and violence against women. And further emphasizing that women's

full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life is critical to a stable democratic and economically prosperous world.

Reaffirming that corruption is both a transnational and local problem and has a negative impact on development and poverty reduction. Corruption impacts the poor disproportionately and hinders economic development by diverting investments in infrastructure, institutions and social services. Corruption is an insidious threat to democracy that fosters an anti- democratic environment that leads to disrespect for institutions and legitimate authority.

Reiterating that compliance with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other relevant and applicable international human rights instruments is fundamental to the participation of countries in the Community of Democracies.

The Governing Council of the Community of Democracies:

1. Expresses concern over backsliding from democratic institutions and values and threats to civic space in many parts of the world, as well as challenges to the rule of law.

2. Intends to lead by example and urge other Participating States to:

a) Prioritize support to countries undergoing democratic transition or emerging from conflict in order to focus on the principles of rule of law, good governance, human rights, institutional capacity, and inclusive, participatory mechanisms for decision making;

b) Strengthen international cooperation, including in the framework of the United Nations, and democratic mechanisms, to counter terrorism in compliance with States' obligations under international law;

c) In this context, the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies condemns the terrorist attack perpetrated this morning on the London underground;

d) Promote and respect human rights and the rule of law, as well as inclusion and diversity, in counter-terrorism efforts, especially those aimed at preventing and countering all forms of violent extremism. Long-term success and

sustainable progress require that we support locally led responses that address underlying drivers of radicalization to violence, including violent extremist narratives online;

e) Respond to requests for assistance from governments in transition to democracy, as they engage in democratic processes, support building and strengthening democratic institutions, including for the purpose of ensuring that all citizens are able to participate fully in fair and transparent electoral processes;

f) Reiterate the importance of inclusiveness in recognition that democracy is enhanced when the full range of public life and influences on decision making include Indigenous peoples and all persons, regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion or belief, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, political or other opinion, social and property status and disability;

g) Enhance political participation of women in all situations, including during political transition, to promote and protect the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by women with respect to: (a) Engaging in political activities; (b) Taking part in the conduct of public affairs; (c) Associating freely; (d) Assembling peacefully; (e) Expressing their opinions and seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas freely, free from harassment, hindrance and insecurity, including online.

3. Welcomes the voluntary adoption and implementation by Participating States, as appropriate, of the additional supplemental indicators developed under the auspices of the Community of Democracies in order to achieve the full scope and spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

4. Calls on Participating States to establish accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and facilitate public procurement processes that are competitive and innovative by ensuring that public contracts are awarded and managed openly, accountably, fairly and consistent with applicable law. We emphasize the importance of checks and balances with independent judicial and legislative institutions to maintain rule of law and promote accountability.

5. Intends to lead by example and urge other Participating States to do the same, and to:

a) Promote laws, policy decisions, and practices, which enable civic space and a free press consistent with international legal obligations, and oppose legislation, policies and practices that unduly restrict civil society and independent media;

- b) Undertake diplomatic and coordinated action to promote and protect civic space, online and offline, and other independent voices in countries where they are under threat, and to defend the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, association, and peaceful assembly, without distinction of any kind;

- c) Engage with civil society and share best practices on how to better protect and strengthen democratic and civic space, including online, and encourage involvement of all members of civil society in the processes of democratic governance at the local, national, and international levels;

- d) Enhance our efforts, individual as much as joint, to promote the resilience of civil society in the face of disinformation, including online, and any other attempts aimed at weakening, artificially dividing or undermining our societies from within and without;

- e) Engage in multilateral fora in the promotion of the Warsaw Declaration principles and in particular at the United Nations Human Rights Council, striving to coordinate actions to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, with emphasis on supporting United Nations human rights special procedures, as well as the independence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.