



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES

Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on the World Youth Day for Democracy

Today we celebrate the World Youth Day for Democracy, a day to highlight young people's role in the advancement of democracy.

The world is becoming a younger place with an unprecedented growth in youth numbers, creating a vast potential for growth and progress provided that representative governments offer a conducive environment for young talent to flourish. In many parts of the world, inspirational young leaders are democratic assets, making significant contributions to their communities. But in many places, and especially in the least developed countries, youth potential faces multiple barriers related to poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education. And with limited opportunities for inclusive participation in the decision-making process in many countries, youth often feel marginalized and excluded.

We are witnessing a growing disconnect between youth and their governments. Too many young people are losing faith in democracy and do not trust their leaders and institutions. For democracies, this means it is more vital than ever to reach out to the youth. Governments must take concrete steps to engage with young people to create a better understanding of their expectations towards democracy and involve them in the decision-making process through democratic institutions.

Empowering youth in politics, creating avenues for engagement and reducing barriers for young people's political and economic participation are central to addressing the factors associated with violent extremism – as highlighted in a recently published report of the Democracy and Security Dialogue, commissioned by the Community of Democracies and developed under the leadership of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Tunisian Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa. The report found that countries with less youth participation in governance and a lack of youth empowerment programs have a high rate of their young population indoctrinated with extremist ideologies. As emphasized by the report's authors, we must embrace the youth as responsible citizens and prepare them to lead their societies in accordance with universal human rights values. This is the path to peace and security.

This year's theme of the World Youth Day for Democracy is Youth Now. Often, people speak of youth as the future: for the Community of Democracies, youth are the present; it is time to act together and the time to act is now.