

**SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE AMERICAS:
CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES**

Remarks by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you concerning Democracy in a time of pandemic.

It is already clear to all of us that Covid-19 will have a lasting impact on our world. The rapid spread of the pandemic with its consequences to public health and the global economy caught many societies not fully prepared.

Yet. Resiliency and self-correction are hallmarks of democracy as is teaming up to face a common challenge

Our Governments must work **together** to ensure that democratic principles are respected even as extraordinary measures may need to be taken. While we work and sacrifice to stay healthy and keep our communities safe, we can't lose sight of our hard-won human rights, we can't ignore challenges to our freedoms.

As an international coalition of states, the Community of Democracies believes democratic nations, together with civil society, can take necessary measures to protect citizens while at the same time defending the integrity of democracy.

Bringing together government and civil society and supporting one another in challenges to democracy were all motivations for the founding of the Community of Democracies some 20 years ago, in June 2000.

At that time, 106 states, including 22 from this region, gathered in Poland to look at the changing world, to look at the many shapes and sizes of democracy that were present, and to think of ways to work to support one another.

Chile, Mexico and the United States were among the original Convening Group.

And today nine states from the Americas serve on our Governing Council.

What made the Community of Democracies different as an intergovernmental body is that it was not built on linguistic, geographical or economic criteria but on commitment to universal values of democracy, found in the Warsaw Declaration.

The Warsaw Declaration stands with the Inter-American Democratic Charter as a road map to democratic values and fundamental freedoms.

The Declaration's 19 basic and **universal** principles reflect the belief that democracy is always a work in progress, with new challenges constantly arising at national, regional and as we see with the pandemic– at global levels.

The challenges to democracy are many and they are both internal and external. Traditional challenges such as voter apathy or corruption have been joined by new challenges such as this global health crisis which no one country can defeat on its own.

I propose to you that an effective response to the pandemic can be found in the Inter American Democratic Charter and in the Warsaw Declaration and its **19 principles, which are as relevant today as 20 years ago.**

Let me mention just a few of those Principles:

Principle 4 states that democracy must provide public access to reliable and independent information – one important tool against the virus today is transparency and sharing of information.

And this access to information cannot be fully achieved without the right of the free media to collect, report and disseminate information, news, and opinions, which is **Principle 7**.

I've mentioned civil society - it is a key partner of governments in responding to crisis, as they play a vital role in raising awareness, disseminating information, framing inclusive policies, and advocating for the protection of fundamental rights.

During this time when physical assemblies and gatherings are restricted due to health conditions, ensuring freedom of peaceful assembly and association (even if only online)

That's Warsaw Declaration **Principle 9**.

The Member States of the Community of Democracies have found that crises like this may require extraordinary measures. Tough decisions have had to be taken, about important parts of everyday lives.

But in democracy these actions are measured by the principle of the rule of law, including conformity with the constitution of all actions of public authorities.

Even 20 years ago, the Warsaw Declaration spoke to the issue of extra-constitutional actions through **Principle 13**: that elected leaders should uphold the law and function strictly in accordance with the constitution and procedures established by the law.

Principle 16 says government institutions should be transparent, participatory and fully accountable to citizenry. And so, this means information on specific limitations and requirements placed on us for our own safety, should be thoroughly justified and explained.

The Principle also states It is important that judicial and parliamentary checks and balances remain strengthened at all times, even in crisis.

And I must mention **Principle 19**: that in all that is done by government “all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social be promoted and protected.”

Addressing risk to democracy through dialogue and common action goes back to the founding of the Community, when US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the essential role for this coalition was to bring together democracies new and old to help each other meet common challenges.

And so, I thank the OAS delegations of Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and the United States and I thank the Chair of the Permanent Council for bringing us together today- for providing space for a knowledge exchange on approaches and tools to further democracy and its resilience in the Americas during the pandemic and beyond.

In closing,

The world entered this current crisis at a time when citizens in many countries were unhappy with their governance, feeling that even democratically elected governments were not always up to addressing some of the major problems of the time.

The Covid-19 crisis has further raised the bar by adding a new challenge.

I remain convinced it will be strong and inclusive democracies that effectively address and respond to challenges and lead us out of this situation.

One key means of this will be upholding the democratic norms and principles of the Warsaw Declaration and the Inter American Democratic Charter.

Underpinning democracy is trust, or at least the common assumption that elected officials and institutions are working together for the best interest of people.

And while that trust has been weakened, this global crisis I think will allow democracy, with its openness with its accountability, to show it is best suited to protect citizens' health, while ensuring protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the same time.

Thank you for the invitation to join you today, I offer you best wishes for continued good health and look forward to this discussion.