

***BUCHAREST MINISTERIAL DECLARATION
OF THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES
(NEW YORK CITY)
September 22, 2021***

We the Participants in the Tenth Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies held virtually on 22 September 2021, in the margins of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly:

Reiterating that our Community is based on the respect for the universal value of human dignity, for the principle of equality, for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Reaffirming our common adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as all other relevant international instruments,

Reaffirming our unwavering commitment and adherence to the purposes and principles of the Warsaw Declaration of 27 June 2000, establishing the Community of Democracies, including our determination to work together to promote and strengthen democracy,

Reaffirming our desire to promote universal respect for and the observance and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all in accordance with the aforementioned instruments,

Expressing great concern over the democratic backsliding trend, present in different parts of the world, having resulted in an obvious deterioration of the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and significant challenges to the rule of law and functioning of State institutions,

Emphasizing that democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principles of the rule of law are interdependent and mutually reinforcing,

Recognizing that democracy does not belong to any country or region, but at the same time all democracies share common essential features,

Recognizing also that social cohesion, inclusion, equality, gender equality and the well-being of the population are essential components of a resilient democracy,

Emphasizing the importance of human rights, rule of law and democracy for achieving sustainable development and prosperity with lasting peace, freedom; and that development and

social and economic progress should be based on respect for human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and the rule of law. This is essential to implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its Sustainable Development Goals, while ensuring that no-one is left behind,

Noting with concern that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19 disease) pandemic has been and remains one of the greatest global challenges of our times and expressing deep concerns regarding its impact on health, the loss of life and well-being, particularly for women and girls, as well as enjoyment of human rights and implementation of the principles of the Warsaw Declaration,

Noting with concern that in response to the unprecedented threat to public health posed by the pandemic, governments around the world have been implementing extraordinary measures, policies and strategies, such emergency measures should be applied in a non-discriminatory way, have a specific focus and duration, and be in accordance with the State's obligations under applicable international human rights law with due care taken to avoid disproportionate impacts on democracy, the rule of law, civil society, gender equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and labor rights, such as unwarranted closure of civic space and undue restrictions on civil and political rights both offline and online,

Recognizing that as extraordinary measures may need to be taken for the protection of public health, all governments should work to ensure that democratic principles are maintained and respected and, to this end, such measures should be targeted, necessary, transparent, non-discriminatory, time-bound, proportionate and in accordance with their obligations under applicable international human rights law, and reaffirming that derogation from International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is only permitted in accordance with Article 4,

Emphasizing the importance of the meaningful participation of youth, including girls and young women, and those who are in vulnerable or marginalized situations in democratic processes and decision-making at the national, regional, and international levels and ensuring that youth policies and programs include the views, perspectives, and priorities of young persons in their design and shaping,

Recognizing that civil society, including non-governmental organizations, women's rights organizations and community-based organizations, feminist movements, youth-led organizations, independent media, human rights institutions and individual actors such as human rights defenders, journalists, volunteers and all other stakeholders, have a vital role in raising awareness, sharing information, advocating for democracy and human rights, and holding governments accountable. In addition to contributing to a healthy democratic environment, civil society organizations are also well-positioned for promoting resilient and innovative community responses to health crises,

Emphasizing that an enabling environment for civil society and an independent media are essential components of a sustainable democracy and underlining the importance of continuous support for members of civil society and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to exercise and promote freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and freedom of religion or belief,

Recalling in this context that effective legal remedies, including those provided by a competent, independent and impartial judiciary, are essential to promote, protect and uphold these rights,

Noting with concern the decline, in some parts of the world, of the promotion and protection of human rights including as a result of increased restrictions placed on individuals, civil society and the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, religion or belief in some countries,

Noting with concern that corruption is a serious threat to the stability and the security of societies and undermines the institutions and principles of democracy, ethics and justice, eroding public trust in governments, jeopardizing sustainable development, the rule of law and good governance,

Bearing in mind that the prevention and eradication of corruption is in the interest of all States and that they should cooperate with one another, with the support and involvement of individuals and groups outside the public sector, for which a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach is required,

Reaffirming that corruption is both a transnational and local problem that may affect all societies and economies and has a negative impact on development and poverty eradication,

Recalling that corruption impacts the poor disproportionately and hinders economic development by diverting investments in infrastructure, institutions and social services,

Underlining the fundamental importance of education for democracy and human rights as a fundamental tool for participation in the democratic process and an instrument to effectively promote, protect and realize all human rights,

Emphasizing the necessity of civic education among the youth on democratic principles such as free and fair elections, a peaceful transition of power, checks and balances and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms including rights of persons belonging to minorities and persons in vulnerable or marginalized situations,

Stressing the complementarity and mutual reinforcement of human rights education, training and learning and education for democracy,

Underlining the relevance of education and training regarding the impact of media and information for democracy, in order to reinforce digital and media literacy of citizens, in regard to: misinformation, disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, *inter alia*, in terms of electoral processes,

Recognizing that equal enjoyment of the right to education, including primary and secondary education for all persons including girls, as well as affordable technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, contributes to the strengthening of democracy, good governance and the rule of law at all levels, the reduction of economic inequality, the realization of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and economic autonomy of all people,

Recognizing the significant role and potential of digital technologies for effective and accountable democratic governance as well as for an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including by supporting States' efforts to protect public health, support connectivity to promote access to information and increased economic opportunity, promote inclusive and quality education and bridge digital divides, with particular attention to, *inter alia*, women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and members of other marginalized and vulnerable groups, and promoting digital inclusion to respect, protect and fulfil human rights,

Recognizing that digital technologies, in particular the internet, provide a unique platform that enables individuals to exercise their human rights, including freedom of opinion and expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers, while at the same time, expressing concern over the growing trend of State and State-sponsored actors to curb these freedoms, and diminish privacy rights and data protection,

Recognizing also the enormous potential of digital technologies to support the advancement of gender equality including all women's full, equal and effective and meaningful participation in political, economic, cultural and social life,

Reaffirming that the same human rights that individuals have offline must also be protected online, including the right not to be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, with special regard given to the protection of children,

Expressing great concern over authoritarian governments increased use of repressive tactics abroad such as surveillance, abductions, harassment of family members, in order to coerce action from the targeted individual abroad and restrictions on movement and physical violence, to target and silence critical voices, such as opposition leaders, journalists, artists, human rights defenders and civil society actors around the world,

Expressing also great concern about the irresponsible exploitation of vulnerable groups for political ends by some authoritarian regimes,

We, the Community of Democracies

Recognize the threats emanating from the irresponsible use and abuse of information and communication technologies, including cyber threats, widening inequalities, growing spread of disinformation, and surveillance of human rights defenders, journalists, and others for politically motivated reasons, through means such as online smear campaigns and targeted harassment, which may undermine the enjoyment of human rights, threaten democratic governments and societies, and erode the rules-based international order,

Call upon Participating States to oppose and counter authoritarian regimes targeting individuals exercising their human rights by their borders raising the costs and consequences for those that engage in repressive activities abroad,

Recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the capacity of institutions, reaffirm our commitment to promote good governance at all levels and to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions and more responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes,

Call upon Participating States to ensure that all human rights are respected, protected and promoted, both online and offline, while combating the pandemic and that their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are gender responsive and are in full compliance with their international human rights obligations,

Stress that the COVID-19 crisis, while posing a challenge to open societies, provides further reason for the strengthening of democratic institutions, democratic governance and transparency, and that COVID-19 does not diminish the primary responsibility of States to protect human rights and the rule of law, and emphasizing the need for international cooperation for the promotion thereof,

Underline that in order to bring the acute phase of the pandemic to an end, rapid and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and diagnostics is necessary, in addition to scaling up testing and the provision of necessary therapeutics, including medical oxygen,

Stress an urgent need to ensure the broad equitable and highest coverage of safe, effective, affordable and quality-assured vaccines in all countries, especially developing countries, and welcoming all efforts to escalate production and distribution of vaccines on an equitable basis, including the efforts of countries that have committed to financial contributions to the ACT

Accelerator and dose-sharing through COVAX as well as other multilateral and bilateral cooperation, which is crucial for societies to return to normal,

Urge Participating States to increase international cooperation to prevent and combat corruption, international transfer of proceeds of crime, and to promote financial transparency, accountability and integrity for sustainable democracy,

Call upon Participating States to step up efforts to promote and effectively implement anti-corruption obligations and robust commitments under the international anti-corruption architecture, including those contained in the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the Political Declaration adopted June 2, 2021 at the thirty second Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, which reaffirmed Member States' common commitment to identifying and addressing gaps and challenges within the international anti-corruption framework,

Call upon Participating States to actively promote a civic culture of inclusion and respect for diversity, recognizing that inclusion is a key democratic value which requires the expression of a diversity of views free from divisive polarization; which advances the full, equitable and meaningful participation of all without discrimination; and which strives to better represent the diversity of the population in government, public institutions and civic spaces,

Call upon Participating States to engage in government-to-government and people-to-people linkages to promote civic education and literacy, including education for democracy,

Strongly encourage Participating States to integrate education for democracy, along with civic education, lifelong learning education, human rights education, digital education and education for sustainable development into their education standards and to develop and strengthen programs, curricula and curricular and extracurricular educational activities aimed at the promotion and consolidation of democratic principles and democratic governance and human rights, while incorporating advances in information and communication technologies in order to facilitate the above-mentioned processes,

Invite Participating States to strengthen the Community of Democracies' YouthLeads initiative through cooperation and exchange of experiences among countries, with emphasis on education for democracy and capacity building, aimed at strengthening the culture of peace and the promotion of a democratic culture in which understanding, pluralism, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation prevail,

Call upon Participating States to respect, protect, and fulfil all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all young persons, including standards and principles enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration, while ensuring that youth policies and programs include the views, perspectives and priorities of young persons in their design and shaping,

Urge Participating States to promote equal opportunities for all young persons and to eliminate all forms of discrimination of any kind, including those based on age, disability, race, color, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, ethnic, national or social origin, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, and to foster inclusion through full, equitable and meaningful participation in society for all, including young persons with disabilities, indigenous youth on an equal basis with others, and to promote the rights of young persons living in situations of occupation or which are abused by terrorist entities,

Express concern about the indirect negative effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, affecting young persons disproportionately, in various forms, from the mental health effects of isolation to the economic effects such as the loss of jobs and opportunities and, in this regard, to call upon States to grant special protection to youth during the pandemic and post-pandemic phase, including recovery plans by designing and implementing appropriate strategies and projects, related to capacity-building, education, improving well-being and mental health, recovery from traumas, or reintegration in society,

Underscore that an enabling environment for gender equality, the empowerment, autonomy, and the leadership and full, equal and meaningful participation of all women in political life as well as in economic and social life, is paramount for the full enjoyment of human rights, and is key to democratic development, which goes hand in hand with poverty reduction, achieving sustainable development and the effective combating of diseases,

Call for an increase in the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in their diversity of situations and conditions, including indigenous women and women with disabilities, in political processes, as well as an increase in representation in governmental, regional and local institutions, including at all decision making levels, while also taking into consideration that ensuring women's full equal and meaningful participation and representation in all COVID-19 response and recovery efforts is essential to tackling disproportionate socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls,

Recognize that resilient democracies are based on a strong and effective civic participatory process and, as such, must continue to protect the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association and peaceful assembly, to respect and promote civic space, online and offline, highlighting the paramount role of a freely functioning civil society and independent media,

Reiterate our willingness to cooperate and share best practices and experiences to support and empower democracy worldwide, and to uphold democratic principles in countries that are going through transition or where challenges have occurred,

Support and encourage a Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world,

Stress that, while resilience is an inherent characteristic of democracy, this trait needs to be constantly and vigilantly pursued; as such, *calls on* Participating States to promote and nurture the full, equitable and meaningful participation of all, in the open and inclusive civic spaces that underpin the rule of law; consolidating pluralistic, independent institutions is of added value only if it represents and is beneficial for individuals,

Emphasize the importance of enhancing domestic, as well as external resilience, and the role effective multilateralism, rooted in a rules-based international order with the United Nations at its center, can play in defining a common agenda to address threats to our common democratic principles,

Strongly condemn all acts of violence, including terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, motivated by racism, xenophobia, ethnic, religious or belief-based hatred, gender discrimination and political platforms which incite such acts. Also strongly condemn political platforms which incite such violence stressing their incompatibility with democratic principles, while expressing great concern over the rise of racism and other forms of hatred in the COVID-19 context,

Recognize and intend to address, in a manner consistent with our obligations under international law including human rights law, the special needs of all people in vulnerable situations who are traveling within large movements, including those who had been subject to irresponsible exploitation,

Underscore that preserving and promoting the values of multilateralism and international cooperation is fundamental for peace, security, development and the respect for all human rights around the world, and that multilateral tools, including the rules-based multilateral trading system, are especially useful at times of international crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, while trends such as protectionism and isolationism pose challenges to dealing with such threats of a global nature,

Call for the coordinated actions and engagement in multilateral and multistakeholder fora to harness the potential of new technologies to protect and promote human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic governance, while mitigating technologically enabled threats to the enjoyment of human rights and democracy,

Call for the strengthened international cooperation to promote the free flow of information as well as initiatives aimed at building digital systems that respect human rights and positively contribute to democratic resilience and a rules-based international order,

Call upon Participating States to consider adopting and maintaining data protection legislation, regulation and policies, including on digital communication data, that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Resolve to 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 promote and protect 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.