

**10th Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies**  
**Democracy and Resilience: Shared Goals**  
**September 22, 2021**

**Remarks by CoD Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett**

Excellencies, Governing Council members, representatives of civil society, distinguished guests and colleagues

Good day and welcome to Democracy and Resilience: Shared Goals, the 10th Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies.

Let me thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, H.E. Bogdan Aurescu, for hosting the ministerial in today's challenging circumstances related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Romania for the leadership shown during its current Presidency of the Community of Democracies. Let me assure you, Minister Aurescu, that Romania's contribution to our Community is highly appreciated in this period of change, resilience, and opportunity.

Since the founding of the Community of Democracies two decades ago, this is the first Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies which will not occur in a multi-day gathering of democracies and civil society.

It had been my hope, and that of the Romanian Presidency, to see democratic nations and reformers and activists all in one space, exchanging ideas and thoughts. But at the request of the host city and host state of the United Nations to minimize the ongoing threat from the pandemic, the Community of Democracies is doing its part in reducing the public health risks by moving online, even if this was not the scenario that we first sought.

The COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the most significant global challenges of our times and, some 20 months into this crisis, it continues to impose a heavy impact on people's health and well-being and present a threat to the enjoyment of human rights and the principles of democracy.

To protect people, governments around the world have been implementing extraordinary measures, policies, and strategies. In 2020, the 28 Member States of the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies quickly addressed the pandemic, publicly stating emergency measures must be necessary, proportionate to the evaluated risk and 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.

We have to continuously assess the impacts of pandemic policies on democracy, the rule of law, civil society, gender equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and labor rights, and be aware that such steps must not purposefully or inadvertently reverse freedoms, as in unwarranted closure of civic space and undue restrictions on civil and political rights both offline and online.

Even in the shadow of the pandemic, democracies must gather and act together.

The Community of Democracies, in its meetings, is a convening of values and principles but not a gathering of identical models of democracy. The diversity and inclusion of the Community of Democracies are best illustrated in the range of its Governing Council representing every region and *the global participation of over hundred states in bi-annual ministerial meetings*.

We know that there exist various expressions for democracy to operate successfully and that democracy does not belong to any one country alone. In this diversity, nevertheless, we believe that there are certain constant conditions that a political system must fulfill to be democratic. The Community of Democracies is based on respect for the universal value of human dignity, the principle of equality, the rule of law, and human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Governing Council Member States of the Community of Democracies have a shared adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as a regularly renewing commitment and dedication to the goals and principles of the Warsaw Declaration of 27 June 2000, the founding document of the Community of Democracies.

The Community of Democracies brings together young and old democracies to strengthen representative government by sharing experiences and coordinating policies.

Values-based alliances are today of utmost importance since we still find, in different parts of the world, the worrying trend of democratic backsliding, deterioration of the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and significant challenges to the rule of law and functioning State institutions.

Wide-ranging problems, such as the rise of populism, or corruption, and other issues, sometimes lead to increased xenophobia and social polarization; the global pandemic adds to the never-ending challenge to open societies, and its consequences for the enjoyment of human rights and implementation of the principles of the Warsaw Declaration are still to be measured.

Authoritarian countries exploit contemporary challenges to open and transparent democracies through malign interference in elections and distorting social discourse. Democracies must respond and guard against authoritarian regimes by strengthening their adherence to the rule of law and human rights and Democracy within their borders.

Robust, inclusive, and accountable institutions are the cornerstone of stable democracy. The Community of Democracies has been engaged in supporting the implementation of Goal 16 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions.

The Community of Democracies works together with governments and civil society partners to promote discussion, exchange experiences, and identify best practices to strengthen democratic institutions and uphold the principles enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration.

A necessary means of showing this adherence will require confronting problematic issues, like corruption. Corruption is a threat to the stability of societies and undermines the institutions and principles of Democracy and justice, eroding public trust in governments, jeopardizing sustainable development, the rule of law, and good governance.

Another characteristic of democracy that must be strengthened to respond to internal challenges is a renewed effort to include women, youth, and other marginalized groups. Democracies present an enabling environment for gender equality, empowerment, autonomy, and leadership and full, equal, and meaningful participation of all women in political life and economic and social life.

On the margins of this 10th Ministerial, the Community of Democracies yesterday hosted an online event on Enhancing Peace Through Women's and Girls' Education, which highlighted the critical value of education of women and girls for peacebuilding processes and conflict resolution.

A further solution to democracy's challenges can be found in the meaningful participation of youth, including girls and young women. Youth empowerment is one of the priorities of the Romanian Presidency and a cross-cutting theme in all Community of Democracies actions. The young people gathered around our organization - the Community of Democracies Youth Leads – have been engaged in the global #ThisIsDemocracy campaign, adding their powerful voices as champions to promote shared democratic values.

On the margins of this 10th Ministerial Conference, a companion virtual CoD Youth Forum will gather youth leaders from different world regions to discuss democracy-related issues with government stakeholders, enabling an authentic exchange of views on the challenges and opportunities faced by Democracy worldwide.

Young people play a crucial role in promoting democracy and driving democratic changes in their countries, and all democracies have a responsibility to support them.

We need to ensure full realization and enjoyment by young persons of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including standards and principles enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration, promoting equal opportunities and fostering their public and political life participation.

Without ensuring proper civic education and literacy, including schooling for democracy, the future of liberty in the world faces a continued challenge.

I believe that through efforts such as these, the Community of Democracies and its Member States can prove democratic resilience.

The Community of Democracies, which for two decades has reflected the diversity of world democracy, provides a unique platform for multilateral support for those who wish to share best practices and

experiences to support and empower democracy worldwide, particularly for the countries that are going through transition or where challenges have occurred.

Illiberal tendencies are still all too prevalent, undermining civil liberties and representative institutions. The Community of Democracies offers all states our willingness to cooperate. Democracies need to work in partnership, in shared values, to defend our achievements and practical multilateral cooperation is the key to countering corruption, protecting human rights, and responding to authoritarianism.

To this end, let me expressly state the Community of Democracies' support for and encouragement to the U.S. Administration's Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world.

Even in these times of hardship, the Community of Democracies will continue to support other democracies. To combat democratic backsliding, overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure full inclusion, we must act together and prove that democracies are resilient.

We can do this: democracies are not perfect but resilient democracies are based on a solid and effective civic participatory process which, unlike authoritarian nations, protect the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association, and peaceful assembly, respect and promote civic space, online and offline, highlighting the paramount role of freely functioning civil society and independent media.

Yet, even as an inherent characteristic of democracy, resilience needs to be constantly pursued. We must promote and nurture the full, equitable, and meaningful participation in the open and inclusive civic spaces that underpin the rule of law, consolidating pluralistic, independent institutions.

The essential partner in this is civil society, including non-governmental organizations, women's rights organizations, community-based organizations, youth-led organizations, independent media, human rights institutions, and individual actors such as human rights defenders. They have a vital role in raising awareness, sharing information, advocating for democracy and human rights, and holding governments accountable.

Protecting an enabling environment for civil society and an independent media and effective legal remedies, including those provided by a competent, independent, and impartial judiciary, are essential to promote, protect and uphold these human rights and democracy.

Another vital component in democracy's toolkit is the enormous potential of digital technologies. As the Community of Democracies acknowledges the possible 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, the Community of Democracies new Working Group on Democracy and Technology is looking to 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. Technology and social media companies are our reliable partners in this effort.

The Community of Democracies stands ready to be at the forefront of these endeavors through multilateral fora in promoting the Warsaw Declaration principles, particularly at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

At the Community of Democracies' founding Ministerial Conference in Warsaw in 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated: "This meeting is not just a celebration. You are here because you know that the work of democracy is never done - that too many people are still denied their human rights, while too many democracies remain imperfect and vulnerable to subversion by ruthless leaders." True still today.

Democracy will always face the need for ongoing adjustment. But while models of democracy might be diverse, core democratic principles based on the rule of law and respect for human rights remain universal. The Community of Democracies' Member States accept that democracy will always face complex challenges and agree to resolve them.

Through joint action, we can successfully address the complex challenges to democracy.