



Towards a Community of Democracies

Remarks by U.S. Secretary of State
Madeleine Albright and
Foreign Minister of Poland Bronisław Geremek

Opening Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies
Warsaw, June 27, 2000

The Community of Democracies

The Community of Democracies (CoD) is a global intergovernmental coalition comprised of Member States that support adherence to common democratic standards and values enshrined in its founding document, the Warsaw Declaration.

Established as a shared initiative of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Polish Foreign Minister Bronisław Geremek, the Community of Democracies was founded at the Ministerial Conference held in Poland, where on June 27, 2000, high-level delegations from 106 countries signed the Warsaw Declaration Toward a Community of Democracies. Poland is the host country of the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies, seated in Warsaw.

Secretary of State
Madeleine K. Albright

Remarks at Closing Plenary Session “Towards a Community of Democracies” Conference

Warsaw, Poland, June 27, 2000
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[As Prepared for Delivery]

SECRETARY ALBRIGHT: Foreign Minister Geremek, fellow Ministers, Excellencies, delegation members, and special guests, good morning.

I want to begin by saying “thank you” to the government and people of Poland for convening this conference and for serving as our most gracious hosts.

I especially want to pay tribute to Foreign Minister Geremek, for it is fitting that this democratic conference has been led by a true democratic hero.

Professor Geremek’s courage in the past helped tear down the Berlin Wall. His vision now is helping us to build something entirely different—a global democratic community designed not to divide, but to unite; not to imprison, but to free.

He wanted this city—his city—to be known for something other than the Warsaw Pact; the Warsaw Declaration will be stronger and last longer as a tribute to this great democrat.

We arrived in this city from every conceivable spot on the map. We speak different languages. We have different cultures, histories, faiths, worries and dreams. But we are a Community because we each believe that democracy is a fundamental and universal human right; because we want our own citizens to enjoy this right; and because we are committed to helping others strengthen and sustain it.

We have come to Warsaw because democratic growth has made global cooperation possible—and because democratic vulnerability has made it essential. Because we are dealing here with two paradoxes.

In the long run, democracy is the most stable form of government; but in the short run, it is among the most fragile. And the more democracy spreads, the more at risk it is in more places. Today, a variety of threats are slowing and endangering democratic transitions. It is both right and smart that we offer our help through a variety of tools.

The first Ministerial Panel, which I had the honor to chair, examined one such tool by considering ways we could better promote democracy through the regional and global institutions to which we belong.

One important point made by several delegations during our discussion is that when democratic institutions are threatened, international organizations not only have the right to act, they will often have the responsibility to act in appropriate ways to support democracy. This is particularly the case with regional bodies. Among recent examples we discussed were actions by the OSCE, the OAS, and the OAU.

Of course, international organizations are also playing an increasing role in building and supporting democracy on a day-to-day basis through the provision of technical assistance and assessing whether democratic standards are being met.

There was, however, a consensus in our group that more can be done. We agreed that we should create a democratic caucus within the UN and other appropriate institutions for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of their pro-democracy activities.

Indeed, many favored the idea of establishing such a group at this fall's UN General Assembly in order to support Romania's planned democracy resolution.

There was also agreement in our group to encourage international financial and economic institutions to give full consideration to the connections between development and the essential elements of democracy, such as accountability, transparency and respect for the rule of law.

This is complicated, however, by globalization which, while helping to integrate the world, also threatens to divide it more sharply between the “haves” and the “have nots.” This has severe implications for democracy because, as my colleague from Malawi noted, free institutions have little chance to survive if they are not associated with a better quality of life.

Many in our group voiced their support for debt relief for the most heavily indebted countries, and for international institutions to place the highest possible priority on alleviating poverty.

Our discussions also focused on another aspect of globalization, which is the potential for information technology to aid democratic development. The Internet, for example, is making it far easier for people to reach out to one another, both domestically and across borders, to build coalitions and press for change.

The new technologies also make it harder for authoritarian governments to control the flow of information. As Aung San Suu Kyi demonstrated yesterday so powerfully, some democrats even in authoritarian countries now have access to media through which they may address and seek support from the world.

Those in our group also agreed, in general terms, to support the more open operation of our international institutions, including enhanced consultations with NGOs. Better coordination with grassroots groups can help our organizations play a more relevant and effective role in support of democracy.

My colleagues, we did not come to Warsaw to create a new organization with its own building and bureaucracy. The Democratic Community we are determined to forge will not be comprised of mortar and steel; but of principle and conscience.

We did not come to Warsaw to impose democracy—for that is a contradiction in terms. Dictators impose; democracy is chosen. Nor is democracy a religion, but it is a faith that has lifted the lives of people in every corner of the globe.

We leave Warsaw, understanding that the task we have set for ourselves has just begun.

But we have made a good start by endorsing the Warsaw Declaration, and thereby reaffirming the fundamental principles of democracy, and pledging ourselves to their fuller realization within each of our lands.

We have strengthened our partnership with civil society, which has become increasingly both the trailblazer and the bellwether of democratic progress. We have moved decisively from the stage of celebrating democratic gains to their consolidation by addressing in concrete ways the full spectrum of problems that democratic governments face. We have agreed on fresh ideas for coordinating assistance to the benefit of democracies old and new.

And we have already begun to plan for how we can build steadily on the achievements of this conference.

Half a century ago, after two world wars, leaders from around the globe came together to forge institutions designed to preserve peace, build prosperity and enhance human rights. Their efforts were far-reaching and helped us to survive decades of Cold War division.

Now, at the start of a new century, we have come together here in Poland, to pledge our cooperation in promoting and strengthening democracy. In so doing, we understand that the struggle for freedom is never easy and never over.

But as we embark on this new leg of our journey, we should draw strength from the knowledge that our destination is not the product of some abstract theory, or some mechanistic interpretation of history, or some attempt to place the rights and aspirations of one nation or group ahead of another's.

It is, instead, to fulfill the potential of a philosophy that reflects every person's desire to be free and values the dignity and worth of every child, woman and man. That is why democracy is the one road we can all walk down together. A road whose new beginning we have found this week in Warsaw.

A road that leads toward a true Community of Democracies, and to a future—we are determined—of greater security, prosperity and freedom for all people.

Thank you very much.

Bronisław Geremek
Foreign Minister of Poland

Remarks at the Opening of the Community of Democracies Ministerial

June 27, 2000

It is both remarkable and profoundly logical that in the final months of the closing century representatives of over one hundred nations have gathered for one sole purpose. The motor force driving the presence in Warsaw of foreign ministers and other eminent public figures from all over the world, from every corner of the globe, is the cause of democracy. It is logical because, as the greatest thinkers of our time, among them Amartya Sen, have been pointing out, the emergence of democracy as a universally accepted form of government is the most important development of our century. Democracy has burgeoned and spread across every continent. It has become the norm, something that at the end of the last century would have seemed virtually inconceivable.

Twenty years ago, my country gave the world a new definition of the word “solidarity” and eleven years ago, thanks to such solidarity, it recovered freedom and democracy. That is why Warsaw is not a venue chosen at random. Warsaw gives the problem of democracy a special dimension, one related to the transformations in central and eastern Europe, to the Polish experience of the 1989 Round Table—that is, dialogue pushing the boundaries of the possible, transcending the barriers of distrust and hatred. Warsaw is also associated with the experience of a successful transition to a new economic and political order and the experience of building civil society. Warsaw is a reminder of “the power of the powerless,” as embodied in the struggles waged by Vaclav Havel in the Czech Republic and Lech Walesa in Poland.

Our conference in Warsaw is a remarkable occurrence because it is the first-ever meeting on a global scale devoted solely to the cause of democracy. For it has hitherto been the case that democracy is a topic discussed, as it were, “en passant,” in the context of other grand issues, most often human rights,

development, peace, and security. It seemed to go unnoticed that democracy is a distinct challenge of fundamental significance. In his book *Living in Truth*, Vaclav Havel wrote: “Without free, self-respecting, and autonomous citizens there can be no free and independent nations. Without internal peace, that is, peace among citizens and between the citizens and the state, there can be no guarantee of external peace.”

The fact that we have gathered here in such numbers, representing all regions of the world, all the major civilizations, cultures and religions, and a variety of paths to democracy, means that we share a profound belief in its value and its superiority to all other systems of human existence. There is no need therefore to use this platform to preach to the converted. If we are here it is, after all, because, being adherents of democracy, we are also aware of the challenges and threats that confront democracy and democracies on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

But before I turn to these challenges, I would like to pose a simple question, the answer to which is a democratic credo that I confidently believe is shared by this audience. Why democracy? I think there are five compelling reasons.

One, human rights. Democracy and its associated political liberties, norms and institutions form the bedrock of human freedom and the environment that makes possible people’s spiritual and material development. Not all people, it is true, but an immeasurably larger number of people than under any other system.

Two, peace and security—both within states and between nations. Democracy’s typically peaceful means of replacing ruling elites prevents upheavals and recourse to force by the competing sides in the political arena. However, progress towards democracy, that is, democratization processes, may be accompanied by instability and various kinds of conflicts.

Three, economic development and rising standards of well-being of individuals and whole societies. By creating opportunities for the creativity and enterprise of individuals and groups democracy promotes material progress and satisfies people’s basic needs. There is no negating the existence of a connection between democracy and development and prosperity. The economically advanced countries are also democratic countries.

Four, justice and solidarity. A characteristic of mature democracies is political sensitivity to the weaker and poorer members of the society. Governance must be attuned to the needs and hardships of the disadvantaged, while at the same time people are able to communicate their grievances to politicians and influence the distribution of goods produced by the society thanks to the existence of independent media and other channels of public debate.

Five, participation, responsibility and empowerment of the individuals and social groups which form civil society and thus have a say in shaping government policy priorities, the values embraced in public life and the governing process itself. The virtues and blessings of democracy can be reduced to a common core, the dignity of human being. The concept and role of dignity of human being should, I think, be the starting point for our debate on democracy and international cooperation in working for democracy.

These were the motives which inspired seven countries, Chile, the Czech Republic, India, the Republic of Korea, Mali, the United States, and Poland, when, almost a year ago, they decided on joint organization of a conference, "Towards a Community of Democracies." We were agreed that democracy, civil society, good governance, and human rights were matters that should engage the attention of cooperation of the international community. We accept that it is necessary to go a step further than simply affirming the importance of democracy for human rights, the well-being of societies, and stability and peace of the world. We acknowledge that democracy is a process... We consider it both desirable and essential to involve governments in defining and redefining democracy. This denotes:

First, the application by governments, civil society, and individuals of the standards of democracy. A universal catalogue of these standards is set out in the Declaration prepared by the members of the Convening Group with the help of scores of other states which submitted comments and proposals. I hope that the Declaration will be adopted at the conclusion of our meeting.

Second, if we believe in the beneficial influence of democracy on human rights, development, and peace, we must actively promote respect for democracy in international relations. We should have a vested interest in expansion of democracy as foundation for sustainable development and peace. The hows of this are also referred to in our Declaration. It is a point

strongly emphasized by the World Forum on Democracy currently meeting in Warsaw.

I would very much like the Warsaw Declaration to have as forceful an impact as the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, the Helsinki Accords which proved to be a milestone in spreading the message of human rights and democracy across the walls and barbed wire of the Iron Curtain.

Naturally, our meeting is only a way station on the route towards a community of democracies. We also appreciate the significance of other initiatives, and we give full credit to the role of intergovernmental organizations in this sphere, to the United Nations system and to regional institutions. I strongly believe that our conference and the debate that will occur here will develop, supplement, and enrich these existing initiatives and approaches... The cause of democracy, its future at the dawn of the third millennium, lies in our hands!

Community of Democracies

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