



Strengthening Democracy in the Americas
Discussion hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Carter Center

Remarks by Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett
May 30, 2024

**Dear Secretary General Luis Almagro, Dear Excellencies and
Friends of the Inter-American Democratic Charter**

I would like to thank the U.S Institute of Peace and The Carter Center for inviting me today. I have come from the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies (CoD) in Warsaw, where in a few weeks we will host our Governing Council Meeting. Among the 30 Member States of the Governing Council are ten from this region, including our newest Governing Council Member, Panama.

The CoD welcomes all opportunities to promote awareness of *instruments for enhancing democratic promotion and strengthening,*” such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Through the years, we have joined with the OAS in Geneva and New York City to bring civil society, academics, government representatives together to look at the CoD’s founding document, the Warsaw Declaration, and the Inter-American Democratic Charter and discuss how to utilize these far-reaching instruments in strengthening democracy and promoting democratic culture.

It is an especially timely opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the Community of Democracies. This morning we signed an Memorandum of Understanding between the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, affirming shared and common objectives on the promotion and consolidation of democracy in the hemisphere.

As I just mentioned, this important cooperation between the Community of Democracies and the Organization of American States is not new. We have had for years a long-standing relationship of mutual collaboration and cooperation in the promotion and strengthening of democracy.

Last year I had the opportunity to join a meeting of the Permanent Council of the OAS and learn of the VOLUNTARY GROUP TO FOLLOW-UP ON THE INTER AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER. As we continuously renew our valuable partnership, I look forward to greater collaboration to strengthen our democracies and ensure their resilience, including through the Voluntary Group. The Community of Democracies looks forward to participation of the Voluntary Group and hearing of its accomplishments as we undertake the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Declaration in 2025.

In today's often challenging democratic ecosystem, strengthening dialogue and cooperation on democracy is key.

We are all familiar with the challenges, illustrated by such sources as *V-Dem's 2024 Democracy Report* which cautioned *"the level of democracy enjoyed by the average person worldwide in 2023 was down to levels last seen in 1985"*.

But we also see encouraging signs - As U.S. President Joe Biden noted in the first of the three Summits for Democracy, perhaps the world is reaching an inflection point in which the tide is turning towards a democratic culture. If so, this is not an accident, or a phase in history. It is because of tireless work by groups such as the Friends of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, with your unwavering emphasis that "Democracy is and should be the common form of government for all the countries of the Americas."

Democracies must stand together and respond to the challenges by strengthening their adherence to universal freedoms, the rule of law and human rights.

The promotion, and the preservation, of democratic culture is well addressed by the 19 principles of the Warsaw Declaration and by the rights and values of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, especially in the very serious matter of an unconstitutional interruption of the democratic order.

In the case of the Community of Democracies we see this in effect in the dialogue engaged with the Republic of Mali before the eventual decision to suspend Mali from the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies after a military coup. In the case of the OAS, we see this important attention to protection of the democratic culture in the many interventions to oppose last year's attempts to alter and undermine the constitutional governance in Guatemala.

Democracies are better and do better when they work to promote and protect democracy in their borders and beyond. Supporting one another, holding frank and open discussions, and promoting dialogue and cooperation among states **with the inclusion of civil society and youth**, on policy issues, actions, and trends that represent a threat to democracy and its institutions, is important to ensure sustained efforts for democracy resilience in the region.

Learning from one another and *promoting a democratic culture* is also key to ensure well-functioning democracies.

Today's organizers posed a guiding question: what aspects of democratic culture should be prioritized?

My response is democracy requires institutions but it also requires an engaged and informed citizenry, one that understands democracy. **Education plays a vital role in shaping new democratic citizens**, therefore the promotion of a democratic culture should be prioritized with the younger generation.

Efforts to promote democracy and human rights among the younger generation bolster democratic resilience and strengthen shared democratic principles. In a world facing challenges to democracy and experiencing trust deficits, supporting advocates for democracy,

human rights, and fundamental freedoms is essential for fostering global peace and prosperity.

Given that more than half of the world's population is under the age of 30 and considering their significant contributions as civic and political leaders, investing in young individuals is crucial for driving positive change and fostering a democratic culture.

The Community of Democracies has always recognized that it cannot achieve its mission without the full and active involvement of young people in democratic processes. Our Member States have committed to the idea that meaningful youth participation is critical to the vitality of our democracies.

Young individuals, with their innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, possess the potential to reshape the democratic dialogue and reinvigorate our democratic institutions. Our **Community of Democracies YouthLeads** initiative, which includes young leaders from El Salvador, Canada and Guatemala, is an example of a platform where the voices of young democracy leaders are not only heard, but where they are given **a seat at the table**.

An important upcoming initiative of the Community of Democracies that will help strengthen democratic culture amongst young generations is the **Youth Democracy Network (YDN)**, highlighted by U.S. Secretary of State Blinken during the Ministerial Day of the Third Summit for Democracy.

As we engage in new democracy strengthening initiatives, prioritizing youth engagement at the Community of Democracies, we look forward to our continued collaboration with the Organization of American States, and the Voluntary Group for the Follow-up of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to address challenges to democratic governance in the region, support the effective implementation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Thank you again for the invitation and I look forward to the deliberations from this afternoon's meeting.