

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## THE RATIONALE

The Community of Democracies was convened in Warsaw in 2000 to find ways “to work together and strengthen democracy” and celebrates its tenth year of existence with a commemorative high level meeting in 2010, again in Poland, in Kraków.

As Cambridge scholar John Dunn has observed, while democracy has come to “dominate the world’s imagination,” it has also aroused in some quarters fear and suspicion.

Democracy is not an end in itself. As a form of governance relying on the consent of the governed, democracy is a means of fulfilling individual lives and pursuing common purposes. As such, democracy expresses human aspirations which are judged to be universal.

While no single model of democracy has pride of place, the essential positive components of democracy are straightforward. Among the most prominent are: elected, accountable government; the transparent and equitably applied rule of law; independent media; protection of human rights and freedom of speech; and equal participation by all in selecting political representation. These democratic values represent achievable ideals which today are reflected in the political cultures of most of the world’s peoples and in the aspirations of many others.

By most counts, the number of “free” states has more than doubled in the last few decades, while the number of states considered “not free” has dramatically declined.

Favorable evolution proceeds on every continent, drawing inspiration from history-changing leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Kim Dae-Jung. Notable examples of democratic restoration, consolidation, or advance in recent years include Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Taiwan, and Ukraine – and, as Chilean novelist Isabel Allende declared, “Latin America has opted for democracy.”

John Menru of Tanzania was thinking of a new political climate for Africa when he cited these goals to the late Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, but his aims were universal:

- a. adopt as binding the principle of dialogue;*
- b. ensure society’s participation in public life;*
- c. observe fundamental human rights;*
- d. begin democratization.*

Several African countries – notably Botswana, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, and Tanzania – stand out for fair elections – some for several cycles, and some more recently. They have been applying themselves diligently to fair and effective governance, even if some emphases – e.g. laws in Malawi that criminalize homosexuality – challenge global norms on human rights.

Observers point, however, to an apparent negative counter-trend, including in Africa where other governments have made little progress against corruption. As documented in the World Movement for Democracy’s report *Defending Civil Society* (2008), democracy’s recent reverses have been propelled in part by an authoritarian backlash against the greater openness afforded by new communications technologies and the natural international solidarity these offer civil society. The 2010 Freedom House Annual Report *Freedom in the World* identified a “freedom recession.”

Authoritarian regimes are banding together in a form of resistance to democratic change, in what Belarusian analyst Vitali Silitski termed in a publication of the German Marshall Fund “the authoritarian internationale.” Some of them laud the stability of “liberal authoritarianism” over the dangers of “illiberal democracy”, especially as they point to the global economic recession and financial crisis that began in the autumn of 2008.

While it is hardly plausible that humans anywhere would prefer governments which ignore the principle of consent of the governed in favor of coercion, authoritarian repression can keep the lid on for a time. But repressive government will fail in the longer run: as Gandhi observed, “Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled”, truer than ever now, when democratic norms are much more widely apparent because of the information revolution.

## **THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND NON-VIOLENT CHANGE**

**“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is the supreme law. By it alone can mankind be saved.”**

- Mohandas K. Gandhi

Each democratic culture emerges from civil society in a singular way. But many of the challenges in achieving and consolidating democracy are shared, especially the always challenging transition from a non-democratic society toward democracy, via the building blocks of civil society.

Of course, democracy activists and members of civil society struggling to create democratic conditions under non-democratic regimes often face the harsh dilemma of finding the most effective methods for wresting change from unbending authoritarians. Impatient partisans of change are tempted sometimes by the option of violent direct action. But repressive state security machinery can wield a cruel upper hand against violent insurrection which, in any case, can alienate the majority of citizens concerned about safety.

The most effective route for transformation by civil society of authoritarian repression has been that of peaceful assembly and demonstration, including organized civil resistance, often when a specific issue or grievance fires public discontent and protest. Gandhi defined the model for nonviolent civil disobedience against unjust laws in the first campaigns for human rights he launched in South Africa, which he then applied in the campaign for the self-determination of India.

**Nonviolent civil resistance** has played an important and beneficial role in democratic transition because in contrast to violent insurgency, it teaches democratic values en route to change. Nonviolent movements provide autonomous space for learning decentralized and deliberative methods of policy choice and coalition-building. Because nonviolent movements are participatory and decentralized, they can constitute “incubators of democracy” that assist the transition to democratic governance after a repressive regime collapses. NGOs constitute a factor of continuity as a country transits from top-down control to an institutionally accountable pluralist society.

Once launched, democracy’s concrete rewards must be evident to citizens. Democracy relies on the realization of certain basic human needs and must aim for their improvement. The test of the democratic process is at the intersection between the participation of citizens in their own governance, and the effectiveness of governance in confronting practical challenges individuals face.

For example, freedom from extreme poverty has been termed the first of the essential freedoms – or, as Amartya Sen put it succinctly, “Freedom and development are inextricable.”

John Dunn records the history of democracy's triumphs as a "history of political choice." To succeed, the choice must be a demonstrably effective one, not just for the majority reaping the spoils of electoral victory, but across society as a whole.

Achieving **rightful opportunities for women**, and the end to their abuse, are fundamental objectives and necessities. "The world is awakening to a powerful truth," Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have written in the New York Times. Recalling the Chinese saying that 'Women hold up half the sky', they stress the growing recognition on the parts of organizations as different as CARE and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff that "Focusing on women and girls is the most effective way to fight global poverty and extremism."

Orderly succession of democratically elected political leadership is also a universal need. In announcing the winner of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for African Leadership in October, 2007, Kofi Annan cited particularly ex-President Joaquim Chissano's efforts to build Mozambique democracy on conciliation among ex-opponents. But it is sobering that this award, which is intended to recognize a voluntary, democratic, and peaceful succession of power was not bestowed in 2009 because there was no clear candidate who qualified.

Even though the record of free peoples in self-defense is eloquent, it has been charged that democracy can impede the firm conduct of foreign relations or the organization of defense especially at a time of peril. Authoritarian regimes such as Cuba and Iran invoke threats from outside to justify arbitrary imprisonment of democratic opponents and the general curtailing of civil liberties. In recent years, democratic societies have debated the need to constrain some measure of their established civil liberties in the interests of national security and counter-terrorism. The process of narrowing freedoms is often vexed and the outcome one of unsatisfactory compromises. What is clear is that transparency of purpose and full democratic debate are essential to public support.

It is also debated whether specific economic conditions and models favor democracy taking roots in a society. Some argue that democracy works most effectively only above a certain income threshold. For example, Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo, the author of "*Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*" charges that the West's "obsession with democracy" has been harmful to countries unequipped for it. She maintains that democratic transition first needs an established middle class to succeed. While it is true that an emerging middle class fuelled democratic reform in Mexico, Korea, and Taiwan, there are also notable examples of poorer developing countries choosing and sustaining democracy, such as Mali, or Mongolia.

That being said, China's system of one-party rule combined with pragmatic reliance on free markets and state enterprise in the economy seems at first a seductive model for some poor countries, with special appeal among autocrats who welcome Chinese economic cooperation that comes without lectures on corruption and human rights. At an April 2007 Santiago Roundtable on Democracy in the Americas organized by the Community of Democracies, civil society leaders assessed the problems facing many new democracies in the region. They concluded that the most serious was the too frequent failure to deliver tangible improvements in the lives of citizens. They noted that political parties raise expectations during election campaigns by generating promises of jobs, education and health care that are rarely fulfilled.

A central focus of democracy development support needs to be to help build up the capacity of transitional countries to support the **rule of law** at the core of free societies and market economies. But as Thomas Carothers has written, statutes and courts are not enough if the sense of law does not reside "within the heads" of citizens. Moreover, as Gary Haugen and Victor Boutros point out in *Foreign*

*Affairs*, in many countries laws are rarely enforced. They note that in a June 2008 report, the United Nations estimated that four billion people live outside the rule of law because “without functioning public justice systems to deliver the protections of the law to the poor, the legal reforms of the modern human rights movement rarely improve the lives of those who need them most.”

Socially responsible private investment can undoubtedly support democratic transformation. But the rewards need to be felt generally by the population as a whole. What is clear is that to sustain public confidence, governments must be able to show positive economic achievement with public benefit.

Democratic practice has to be learned. As señora Isabel Allende observed, “A country, like a husband, is always open to improvement.” Even once embarked, the democratic journey is an on-going and evolving process. Dr. Jennifer Welsh of Oxford University reminds us that elected and accountable government provides the ability of a society to “self-correct” in its pursuit of such policy goals. Poland’s Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski spoke at the Lisbon 2009 Ministerial of the Community of Democracies of the continuing need of a democracy “to re-design itself consensually, without violence.”

## THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES

The historical context for democratic outreach is encouraging in that the *Handbook* has emerged when, as observed by Prof. Robert Legvold, for the first time in 300 years there is no strategic rivalry among the world’s leading powers: competition and issue-based friction persist, but not in any existential sense of military competition for influence via proxies among developing countries. Member states of the Community of Democracies have made clear they welcome and actively encourage further peaceful progress toward democratic governance in the world. The Community of Democracies has no ambition to be a bloc defined by or formed in antagonism to non-democratic states, and greatly regrets any tendency of authoritarian states to band together from a sense of shared defensive purpose.

However, if this general policy of outreach and support for democracy development is contradicted by selective and uncritical support for non-democrats as a function of energy, economic, or security interests, there are costs to credibility. As former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said in Oxford, “We must resist the arguments on both the left and the right to retreat into a world of *realpolitik*.”

This is not to dismiss lightly the merits of foreign policies grounded in the realities of national interests as well as aspirations. But the tendency to concentrate funding for democracy support in a relatively small number of countries where interests are particularly evident, such as Mexico, Ukraine, Indonesia, Georgia, Mali, Afghanistan, or Iraq, should not be at the expense of other countries whose democratic transitions are at a vulnerable stage.

The Hippocratic Oath’s admonition to “Do no harm” also has merit. There is indeed a harmful *realpolitik* history, especially during the Cold War, of democracies intervening to influence and even to counter democratic outcomes elsewhere. The subversion of democratically elected governments for perceived reasons of international competition – Iran come to mind – leaves a bitter legacy that has haunted some relationships for generations. When non-democracies band together, there can also be consequences once a democratic shift occurs. Fidel Castro’s support of the Soviet-backed coup against the Czechoslovak government in 1968, and invasion to stifle political reform, haunts Czech-Cuban relations to this day.

More recently, there have been efforts to force democracy on others, most notably via the invasion of Iraq, that some justified by misappropriation of the tenets of the “responsibility to protect”. Ill-prepared attempts to democratize unstable states by force without the support of the people invite ethnic and sectarian conflict. This *Handbook* favors outside arm’s length commitment by democracies to the long-term development of civil rights and civil society, with the emphasis on responsive support for citizens,

democracy activists, or human rights defenders already engaged in peaceful efforts toward democratic empowerment.

There is, of course, something of a paradox involved. On the one hand, there is a long international history of democrats aiding each other, from the intermingling of the American and French revolutions, to the waves of change which swept over Europe in 1848, or in 1989. On the other hand, democracy is about people developing popular self-government for themselves.

Diplomats from democracies need to carry on the tradition of supporting democrats and sharing practical know-how, while deferring to the truth that ultimately democracy is a form of self-rule requiring that things be done by a domestic civil society itself.

It is in this spirit that participating countries of the Community of Democracies value the opportunity on behalf of democrats everywhere to respond to requests for support from reform-minded groups and individuals struggling to introduce and improve democratic governance and human rights in their own societies, and to work with governments and nongovernmental groups to improve democratic governance.

Attempts to block such responsive support for international civil society are a matter of great concern, especially, as the *Handbook* will set out, the rights to help and be helped are consistent with the aims and obligations of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the Warsaw Declaration. (These documents as well as others committing signatories to best practices are catalogued in the Annex).

## **A HANDBOOK TO SUPPORT DIPLOMATIC DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENT**

In reaching out, civil society groups have often turned to embassies or consulates of Community of Democracies participating states for advice and assistance. There is no codified set of procedures for diplomats to follow in order to respond effectively. Each situation is different, presenting unstructured problems and opportunities which diplomats need to interpret according to local as well as general merits, including the bilateral relationship itself. The recent actions of authorities in Iran show that repressive regimes faced with popular protest can construct a false narrative of foreign interference, and contest the legitimacy of any contacts between diplomatic representatives and local civil society. This can be potent when popular memory recalls a history of foreign interference.

Over the last decades, the activity of diplomats from democratic countries constitutes considerable past experience with almost every eventuality. On the basis that the record of such activity could provide helpful guidance to practitioners in the field, the *Handbook* attempts to record it. There has been no systematic attempt to capture and record these diplomatic activities before.

This *Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support* identifies a “toolbox” of creative, human, and material resources available to Missions. It records ways in which Missions and diplomats have drawn from these tools in the past in the interest of democracy development support. The *Handbook* means to cover a full range of conditions and situations, from regimes which are flatly undemocratic and repressive, to phases of post-conflict recovery, to democratic transition and consolidation.

The *Handbook* includes a representative variety of case studies documenting and explaining specific country experiences. It is important that each case study be seen for its specific contextual properties. Nonetheless, there are characteristics which obviously recur. Moreover, it should always be borne in mind that activities and outcomes in one locale can have ripple effects in the region and on wider or specific other relationships.

We also hope to catalogue the growing number of examples of “older” democracies adapting democratic techniques from “younger” ones. The democratic learning experience is not all one-way and capacity-building continues for all. For example, innovative Brazilian methods for enabling citizens to participate in budget-setting exercises in local government have been adapted for use in the United Kingdom.

A review of all these experiences bears out the validity of our belief in our inter-dependence. It will hopefully also provide practitioners with encouragement, counsel, and a greater capacity to support democrats everywhere.