

FUNCTIONAL WORKSHOPS

Promoting Human Rights and Democracy: Supporting the Role of the Democracy Caucus in UN

The topic of this workshop was the role of the UN Democracy Caucus in UN reform, specifically in strengthening the new Human Rights Council. Participants discussed efforts to date to create a UN Democracy Caucus at the UN, composed of those governments invited to participate in the Community of Democracies, to serve as a focal point on human rights and democracy issues within the long-established regional bloc system.

Differences between the new Human Rights Council and the Commission on Human Rights were discussed, including new requirements that Council members uphold the highest standard of human rights, cooperate with the body, make pledges and commitments as candidates, and be elected by an individual and direct vote of an absolute majority of the General Assembly. Participants agreed that the Democracy Caucus should play a more serious role in the UN human rights system.

Participants described the role of the UN Commission on Human Rights as "formidable" even in cases where little shift was visible within a country as a result of the Commission's actions. Governments took such actions seriously, participants said, which is precisely why the Commission had become so politicized and concerted efforts were made by governments to avoid scrutiny and censure. Participants said resolutions on human rights violations served as important symbols and tools for human rights defenders working to expose abuses in country, at the regional level, and in other international bodies. The Commission also served as an important forum in affording international protection to human rights defenders, participants said.

Human rights defenders from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Western countries shared advocacy strategies successfully used at the

Commission and in specific regional bodies, such as the African Commission, to expose human rights violations and exclude abusive countries from leadership positions. The activists also discussed ideas for civil society strategies to strengthen the Council through the UN Democracy Caucus, particularly with regard to the election of the 47 members to the new Council on May 9, who will play a critical role in determining the rules and regulations of the new body.

Civil society campaign strategies should be international and regional and should focus the UN Democracy Caucus' commitment to supporting countries for election to the Council within each region that have good records on human rights protection and promotion. Participants discussed various criteria in determining the human rights credentials of countries, including voting records at the United Nations on human rights resolutions, available assessments on countries' human rights records, openness and accessibility of delegations to human rights organizations, countries' positions on NGO participation at the Council, cooperation with UN special mechanisms, and ratification of human rights treaties.

Smaller countries with good records sidelined by powerful neighbors should be encouraged and supported for election to the Council. Participants said that it was important for countries with poor records not to be completely excluded from the human rights system, as that would make it harder to influence those governments.

Civil society should launch an international advocacy campaign to rotate meetings of the Human Rights Council to "southern" countries and regions outside the Western world to give needed opportunities for southern human rights defenders to attend sessions and to blunt claims by abusive governments that the

UN human rights system is promoting and imposing the values, concepts and interests of Western (or "northern") countries. Sessions held in Geneva or elsewhere in the north should make web casting available for participants in the south who cannot attend sessions physically.

Non-governmental organizations should seek increased participation and access to the Human Rights Council by urging the UN Democracy Caucus to support full and equal participation by non-governmental organizations (i.e. NGOs should sit at the table with governments) as demonstrated by the Community of Democracies itself in its last Ministerial meeting in Chile.

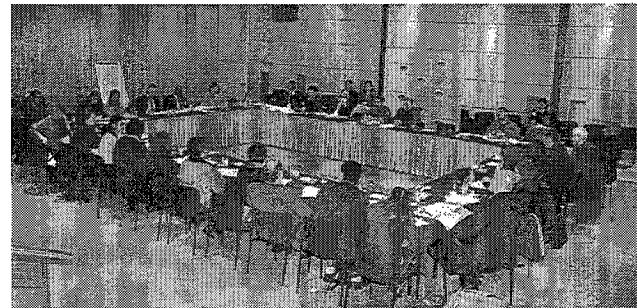
The UN Democracy Caucus should meet formally and in a public framework as often as possible with human rights and democracy organizations from around the world to give defenders international recognition by the Caucus which can serve as protection for groups and activists at home.

Non-governmental organizations should work together as much as possible and adopt common positions, strategies,

and tactics, and share as much as possible resources, accreditation, credit, and time available at sessions of the Human Rights Council to effectively address pressing human rights concerns.

Human rights groups should prioritize lobbying efforts on governments in capitals and respective regional fora as the first step where policies are made, and only second on delegations in New York and Geneva that are largely carrying out instructions. Participants said that actions by governments at the UN were important and symbolic, but it was actions by local citizens and NGOs at home and in regional institutions that were taken seriously by governments and more effective in getting abusive countries censured and shamed at the regional level. Intensive training programs should be carried out to educate governments as well as non-governmental actors on how democracy and human rights issues could be better addressed through international organizations.

Civil society campaigns should encourage the Council to equally promote all human rights, including political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights.



World Youth Movement for Democracy

This workshop was intended to share information about the World Youth Movement for Democracy and build partnerships to develop the Movement in the coming years. The idea of the Youth Movement came from meetings at the World Movement Assembly in São Paulo in 2000, but it has only begun to take shape in recent months, after the South American Regional Office of the Global Youth Action Network was selected as secretariat and the working group met to clarify the intent, aims, and structure of the movement.

The Youth Movement is a network of networks that will support and complement the work of its participants, based on the belief that an effective and sustainable movement for democracy and human rights depends on active participation of young people. Working with young people means working with three generations at once: youth themselves, their parents and relatives that may be affected by new ways of thinking, and their future children. Many organizations within the World Movement have found in recent years that their objectives would be well served by working with young people, and are looking for ideas and tactics for involving them.

This network aims to serve as a platform for young leaders to advocate for the importance of their involvement in democracy building, a

forum for sharing information, strategies, training materials, and other resources, and an action-oriented solidarity movement.

The secretariat has developed a Web site (www.ymd.youthlink.org) and mailing list to serve as a central information source for young democracy and human rights activists and people working with young people to build democracy. These tools will develop as members share information and resources.

The workshop participants committed to acting as the "nucleus" of membership that will share resources and do outreach to other organizations.

Immediate Actions:

- International coordination will focus on reaching out to new members and stimulating idea-exchange and promoting collaborations among these members. Because its membership structure is closely linked to the World Movement, the Youth Movement is especially looking for partners within the World Movement with strong commitments to networking and youth programs.

- All interested participants will send information about their programs, upcoming

events, opportunities for youth, and ideas for collaboration to the secretariat to build the online information hub.

- We will work to develop an agenda for advocacy within the World Movement to give more priority to youth issues and participation. A central proposal would be increasing youth presence at Assemblies.

- Members will organize around the World Youth Day for Democracy, October 18, as a focal point to highlight youth participation in democracy and human rights movements and reach out to youth on these issues. This could be done through hosting discussions, trainings, rallies, concerts, solidarity vigils, or any other activity within with the focus of the organizing group.

Collaborative Projects

As a primary purpose of the WYMD is to share ideas for collaborative action, participants began this process in the workshop. The following ideas stood out:

- Developing national level Web sites (and printed materials) aimed at young people, with information about democracy issues for the country and listings of active groups, projects, events, and opportunities.

- Hosting regional youth assemblies in 2007 or 2008 to bring together youth from different areas of democracy work for capacity building and networking.

- Establishing a solidarity alert and information system, integrated with the World Movement, to call attention to the struggles of member organizations and areas for action.

- Establishing a system for channeling funding towards youth engagement projects.

- Developing a Youth Participation Index and undertaking a survey to evaluate the degree to which different countries open avenues for youth engagement.

- Conducting a global survey of the roles youth play in developing democracy in societies at different levels of democratic development (closed, transitioning, and formally established) and develop a report to act as a guide, reference, and advocacy tool.

- Contact political parties with youth wings to get them involved, and encourage the formation of youth wings where they do not yet exist.

Anyone interested in participating in the Youth Movement is strongly encouraged to get in contact with the secretariat, by sending an email to ymdsecretariat@youthlink.org and checking out our Web site, www.ymd.youthlink.org.