

Democracy Education with the Community of Democracies

Intervention on behalf of the Council for a Community of Democracies
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Thank you, Madame Chair. I have to say, having sat in that chair as Moderator so many times, it is strange for me to be seeing this room from another perspective.

I am here to speak on Democracy Education as an essential element in building Democratic Institutions.

I have the pleasure to represent the Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD), an NGO in Washington that works with a global network of civil society organizations on the promotion of democracy in the context of the Community of Democracies.

As you know, the CD was founded here in Warsaw, and, at the time, it was hoped by its Polish and American godparents that all OSCE participating States would be members in good standing. Many are, I am glad to report -- and as for the States that are not, they already know why.

The current Chair of the CD is Mongolia, an OSCE Asian Partner. Their action priority is Democracy Education, and they have set up a Working Group co-chaired by Poland to advance the cause. Democracy Education is aimed at developing educational practices that will help citizens of all ages play an active part in the democratic life of their country and exercise their rights and responsibilities in society. It has become clear that democratic institutions that lack strong, sustained support from informed citizens are very fragile and prone to failure. Keeping a new democracy depends on informed citizen participation in the ongoing national and local dialogues that take place every day.

Over the past decade, CCD organized three ground-breaking conferences to develop a roadmap that we call the Global Strategic Plan for Democracy Education. The reports are all available online¹. They call on States to develop action plans for Democracy Education at the International, Regional, National and Local levels. The principal method centers on involving stakeholders, not only in government bodies but also educators, parents, and NGOs.

This year, CCD received a grant from the UN Democracy Fund to provide input from civil society to the CD Working Group, and to publish a *Handbook of Best Practices* from around the world. CCD is assisted in this by an international network of NGOs and experts in the field -- from The Gambia, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran (yes), Ireland, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Poland, Senegal, South Africa, the U.S.A., and the OAS.

ODIHR, UNESCO, The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Council of Europe have prepared a Compendium of Best Practices, covering both human rights education and democracy education, in Europe, Central Asia and North America, with nearly 250 pages of concrete examples on how States are working to ensure their citizens understand their democratic principles and opportunities. Everyone here should have a copy, and take it home, and use it.

I want to stress that the Handbook which CCD is preparing for the Working Group is by no means in competition with that Compendium, rather it is meant to complement and expand the scope of information available. But we cannot do this alone – we need input from governments, and from NGOs like you, to help make it comprehensive.

It is essential, for these National Action Plans to bear fruit, that you be involved, whether you are a government representative or a civil society activist.

Please, if you value democracy (and I have to believe that is why you are here today),

- get involved, at national and local levels,
- ensure your country has an Action Plan,
- and ensure it is implemented.

Just like democracy itself, it is a task that requires the greatest depth and breadth of public participation.

One final point: Mongolia and Poland have prepared a resolution on Education for Democracy for adoption by the current session of the UN General Assembly. This was discussed at a meeting at the UN last month to celebrate Democracy Day². They are currently seeking co-sponsors (and you, and your governments, should support it!).

Remember: COE calls it “Education for Democratic Citizenship,” ODIHR calls it “Education for Democracy,” and the CD (and Mongolia) refer to “Democracy Education.”

Frankly, I don't care what you call it, as long as you **do** it !!

Thank you for your attention.

Footnotes/References:

- 1) http://www.ccd21.org/pdf/pocantico_report.pdf,
http://www.ccd21.org/pdf/Pocantico_II_report.pdf,
http://www.ccd21.org/pdf/pocantico_III_report.pdf
- 2) http://www.ccd21.org/activities/education/ccd_unitar_panel.html