



**CLAIMING THE DEMOCRATIC FUTURE:
UNIFYING VOICES FOR A NEW FRONTIER
OCTOBER 25-27, 2022 | TAIPEI, TAIWAN**



**WORLD
MOVEMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY**

Executive Summary

From October 25-27, 2022, the World Movement for Democracy brought together more than 270 democracy activists, journalists, policymakers, and donors from seventy different countries for the 11th Global Assembly in Taipei, Taiwan. Under the theme “Claiming the Democratic Future: Unifying Voices for a New Frontier” democracy advocates came together to build a shared understanding of today’s challenges to democracy, join efforts to counter the growing authoritarian threats, and foster democratic momentum. The Global Assembly was marked by a sense of urgency to strengthen democratic alliances in order to stop the expansion of authoritarian regimes and their sophisticated network of malign actors and enablers.

Through a series of plenary sessions, workshops, fireside chats, and democracy clinics, participants shared innovative strategies and best practices to address challenges to democracy and outlined new agendas to expand civic space and promote democratic values. The Global Assembly also showed support for and solidarity with democracy advocates who are fighting for a free and democratic society in especially difficult circumstances. Assembly participants firmly stated that despite authoritarian attempts to corrode democratic institutions and tarnish human rights, there is no doubt that people in the world want freedom and democracy. Emerging leaders at the Global Assembly presented their articulated vision for a democratic future, and the Global Assembly facilitated intergenerational dialogues to build a sustainable global democracy movement.



Urgency

“We are in the last two minutes of democracy.” – Maria Ressa

The urgent call for unity and action marked the Global Assembly. Participants signaled a sense of urgency to respond to the rise of authoritarian regimes and their sophisticated network of malign actors and enablers. It was clear among all that a new frontier of democratic renewal must be claimed to respond to the growing threats to Democracy. Maria Ressa, Chair of the Steering Committee of the World Movement for Democracy, highlighted the need for immediate action to prevent elections of illiberal leaders who could change the balance of power globally from democracy to fascism.

President Tsai Ing-wen stated that it is imperative to rekindle the democratic alliance to counter the challenges imposed by authoritarian regimes. President Tsai called for unity and cooperation among democrats to “strengthen our resilience and safeguard our values.”

Speaker of the Taiwan Legislature, You Si-kun, opined that democracy advocates must align under the common belief of democracy in order to achieve democratic consolidation and push back against authoritarianism. There is a need to show “authoritarian regimes that the price for invading liberal democracies is too high for them to bear.” As autocratic leaders and dictators work together to suppress opposition and learn from one another, allying to gain and maintain power, democrats now more than ever need to work together to counter their malign influence.

Anne Applebaum of *The Atlantic* magazine explained that modern autocratic alliances are bonded by a common desire to preserve and enhance personal power. She called such alliances “Autocrats, Inc.” Like President Tsai, she stressed the urgency for the democratic world to work together. It is vital for democracy advocates—politicians, civil society, business, journalists, donors, etc.—to leverage their respective strengths to cooperate and develop strategies to successfully advance democracy.



To harness cooperation, Assembly discussions focused on 4 crucial pillars to claim the democratic future: civic space, information space, technology, and emerging generations of leaders. Participants exchanged their strategies, shared experiences and explored ways to build alliances to respond to global challenges. Žygimantas Pavilionis, Lithuanian Member of Parliament, also emphasized the need for the international community to support civil society organizations and develop a common agenda to protect global democracy. He argued that democratic governments need to take a lead on this agenda to defend democratic freedoms.



Solidarity

The Global Assembly was a gathering opportunity for a very diverse group of likeminded democracy advocates demonstrating support and solidarity. Leaders on the front lines of defending democracy, like Ukraine and Taiwan, shared experiences with other leaders where autocratic forces have intervened with brutal and suffocating actions. Democracy advocates from Afghanistan, Burma, Iran, Sudan, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe, and others came together to demonstrate solidarity with one another and support a democratic resilience.



Taiwan, as the host of the Global Assembly, expressed its solidarity and reiterated its commitment to protecting and promoting democracy worldwide. In her opening address, President Tsai emphasized the resilience of the Taiwanese people in defending their democracy. She drew many parallels between Taiwan and Ukraine, as both nations continue to resist authoritarian threats, and reiterated Taiwan's strong commitment to supporting democratic forces under attack around the world in their struggles for freedom.

The Global Assembly featured a candid conversation between Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu and Oleskandr Merzenhko, Chairman of Ukraine's Parliamentary Committee of Foreign Policy. Minister Wu described Taiwan's support for Ukraine as a natural and strategically important step to stop authoritarian threats around the world. Despite international isolation, China's military pressure, and disinformation campaigns, Minister Wu argued that Taiwan must play a leadership role in building global solidarity among democracies. He said that the direct and unconditional support for Ukraine in its defense against Russian aggression sends the strong message of unity and helps protect freedom and democracy all over the world. Echoing Minister Wu, Chairman Merzenhko called for democratic unity to hold perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity accountable. He argued that a threat against one democracy is a threat for all.



Democracy Courage Tributes

As the ultimate expression of global solidarity, the Democracy Courage Tributes were presented during the closing John B. Hurford Memorial Dinner to democracy movements that have demonstrated extraordinary courage, working under particularly difficult circumstances. Through the Tribute presentations, the World Movement reminds the Global Assembly participants that “you are not alone” in fighting for democracy. The 2022 Democracy Courage Tribute recipients are:



WOMEN-LED HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Accepted by Fawzia Koofi, former Vice President of the National Assembly.

Since August 2021, the Taliban have rolled back most of Afghanistan’s’ democratic gains, and women and girls have borne the brunt of the Taliban’s repressive policies and actions. Women from diverse groups, such as schoolteachers, government workers and human rights defenders, have mobilize to defy Taliban violence in the streets of Kabul and other major cities, protesting the regime’s draconian laws and policies reversing Afghan women’s hard-won democratic rights of the past 20 years. This tribute shared solidarity with the work of this women-led human rights movement, which has mobilized public support, including from tribal and religious leaders in the country, to pressure the Taliban to allow girls’ access to education and women’s right to work. The human rights movement represents a changed society in Afghanistan that peacefully resists the Taliban’s repression.



SUDANESE RESISTANCE COMMITTEES: WORKING ACROSS COMMUNITIES TO CLAIM DEMOCRATIC SPACE

Accepted by Marwa Galaleldin, standing in for Ahmed Shakir of the Sudanese Resistance Committees, who was prevented by the government of Sudan from leaving the country to attend the Global Assembly.

“You should not wait for your victory to shed light on our common struggle, rather use the platforms, the media exposure, the presidential meetings and other International solidarity mechanisms offered to you and bring us on board towards our undoubted victory.” – Marwa Galaleldin, Sudan

Since December 2018 when street protests erupted throughout the country, Sudanese Resistance Committees have been the backbone of a pro-democracy movement in Sudan. Over the past 4 years, Sudan has experienced two coups d'état and mass violence by the military against civilians. Despite this turmoil, Resistance Committees have organized countless number of peaceful protests against the military regime. This tribute recognized the innovative tactics that these groups, led by young people, use to encourage citizens to participate in civic space and evolving political processes. These tactics have included public photo exhibitions, movie-screenings, and music productions as inclusive ways that the Sudanese people can reclaim civic space in their country.



YOUNG NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS: GROWING THE FLAME OF THE NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Accepted by Shiwoo Choi of Now Action & Unity for Human Rights (NAUH) and Daehyeon Park of Woorion (Unity of Bridge).

“As a victim of human rights abuses, I must not stay silent. If I stay silent, I know that the oppression and abuse will forever be perpetrated and will continue every day.” - Shiwoo Choi. North Korea



A new generation of North Korean defectors in South Korea is leading the effort to fight for the freedom of North Korean citizens. Young defectors are overcoming trauma, prejudice, and risks to themselves and their families in order to champion the North Korean human rights movement. This tribute honored the courage these youth-led groups display in advocating for a democratic future in the world’s most isolated country, uncovering human rights abuses and providing North Koreans with much-needed outside information. Their efforts are inspiring many others to sustain the hope that a better tomorrow will come.



Agency in Action

“Russian people are not Putin. Venezuelan people are not Maduro. Cuban people are not just Díaz-Canel. Chinese people are not Xi Jinping. I think we need to understand that people in the world, regardless for where they are living, want freedom and democracy.” - Leopoldo Lopez, Venezuela



A major part of the discussion at the Global Assembly was identifying and sharing best practices to address similar issues and challenges in order to defend and advance democracy. In particular the Global Assembly focused on ways democracy activists can work together to fight against malign influences and build a brighter democratic future. To thwart authoritarian action, a panel discussion with leading activists from Cuba, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe recommended supporting democratic activists that:

1. Encourage and find unity among different voices in society. No one person can be the only voice of democracy in a country.
2. Strengthen local grassroots organizations and recognize the role of marginalized communities, giving them legitimacy.
3. Use technology and social media platforms as tools for countering disinformation.
4. Petition civil society organizations and private companies to hold the governments accountable to human rights.



Following the panel discussion, participants outlined strategies and shared ways they could collectively come together to engage different sectors of society. Making the fact-based information about the issues, actions, causes, and social movements available to average citizens is one of most powerful ways to counter disinformation. For example, through his Lightning Talk, Vyacheslav Abramov from Vlast, an independent online news media platform in Kazakhstan, explained how independent media groups work diligently to combat the malign influence of Russian propaganda. In a country surrounded by aggressive powers, Vlast applied the following practices to reach out to citizens with facts:

- Partnering with various local fact-checking websites to combat Russian propaganda;
- Explaining to the people of Kazakhstan why the propaganda is being spread; and,
- Educating communities in Kazakhstan on how propaganda works and what steps they can take to fight it.

In other parts of the world, activists are using pop culture to reach citizens and raise awareness on important democratic challenges. Digmar uses clips from popular Turkish soap operas to discuss activism,. This has drawn the audience into more attention requiring topics, which leads to more in-depth conversations and long-term engagement.

Different forms of art are also powerful tools. Taiwan's Garden of Hope Foundation has organized theatrical performances with victims of domestic violence to advocate for legal protections against such violence. These performances have become safe spaces for victims to share their stories and get involved in legal advocacy.

In Afghanistan, ArtLords have collaborated with communities across different regions to paint murals to protest violence, corruption, and impunity. These creative and innovative strategies are changing the way average citizens engage in conversations about challenges in their societies and provide them with opportunities participate in the defense of their democratic space.



Emerging Leaders

Empowering the next generation of democracy advocates is a key pillar for renewing democratic momentum around the globe. Despite the conventional perception that young people are increasingly apathetic to democracy, the Global Assembly demonstrated that young people are on the forefront of democratic movements. Young people are responding to democratic erosions by transforming political spaces to include more marginalized communities, championing new innovations to foster political accountability, and advocating for policies that address social justice to deliver democracy to all communities.

The younger generations, however, cannot work alone to achieve their democratic ambitions. Alvin Chang, director of the Taiwanese's Youth Association for Democracy, explained, in his remarks during the Global Assembly's opening session, that his group's efforts to reform the country's constitution to lower the voting age in Taiwan required intergenerational engagement and support.

Promoting democratic change also requires youth to deepen their knowledge of how democratic institutions function and how decisions are made. The Global Assembly discussions, such as "Civil Society Reflection on Today's Challenges," "The Future of Democracy: Perspectives of Youth Leaders from Korea and Asia," and "Next Generation: Speak Youth to Power," offered opportunities for different generations to learn from each other how to pursue their desired reform or policy.

Moreover, the Global Assembly participants argued that more must be done to help demystify political processes. The discussions at the Global Assembly recognized that the political discourses in many countries need to tailor more effective messages to younger generations. In addition, political parties and decision-making bodies from school boards to parliaments must increase the representation of young people and women.



Another avenue for securing the democratic future is to encourage the younger generations to enter government. Young activists who enter government, or “crossovers,” are important to help build coalitions and common goals between governments and civil society actors to pursue democratic reform. Participants at the Global Assembly noted that civil society is sometimes hesitant to work with governments due to pre-conceived perceptions; however, encouraging more activists to crossover to government could help rebuild trust and pursue reforms.

Nathan Law of Hong Kong, who was a protest movement leader, then elected to become the youngest legislator in Hong Kong’s history, said at the Global Assembly “we have seen very active participation of young people in protests but not so much in traditional politics. We need to help them understand why it is important for them to be involved in politics.” During a workshop entitled, “Unite for Democracy – Cross-Party Collaboration a Game,” the Council of Liberal Asian Democrats (CALD), a coalition of over 10 political parties in the Asian region, highlighted its efforts to train emerging leaders on political education and leadership and provide them with networking opportunities. Their goal is to expand liberal values within political parties by supporting the new generation of leaders.

"Anything that is made for youth without the participation of the youth is not really for the youth." – Marr Nyang, The Gambia

At the Global Assembly, the World Movement for Democracy launched the “What’s Next? Youth Declaration.” This declaration was created after a series of consultations with young people in more than 10 countries. The initiative was a unique opportunity for young people to discuss how they envision the future of democracy and how they can work to solve the plethora of challenges they see in their communities.



In his Lightning Talk, Marr Nyang, Executive Director of Gambia Participates and former Hurford Youth Fellow, outlined that young people are untied on three key values: inclusivity, accountability, and social justice. Marr demonstrated that those values are firmly integrated in his own work in the Gambia: involving young people in election processes; advocating for more open government budgets; and ensuring that public funds are serving the social-economic needs of the community. Marr echoed the similar observations that other assembly participants made: young people believe in democracy but want opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. He empathized that it is also up to young people to claim democratic space and that the “What’s Next? Youth Declaration” is a framework to help young people achieve their democratic ambitions.



The Global Assembly discussions resulted in the following recommendations to support emerging leaders:

- To expand spaces for young people by investing in innovative and inclusive avenues of inter-generational dialogues that provide opportunities for communities to develop a collective political discourse leading to the productive participation of young people in governance;
- To encourage political parties and policy makers to tailor more effective messages to address young people and create opportunities for the meaningful participation of youth in politics to demystify the political process and deepen their knowledge on democratic institutions and practices;
- To promote youth-focused and youth-led spaces that contribute to foster new leadership, increase youth commitment to liberal values, and active engagement of young people in decision-making process across different sectors of society; and,
- To create equitable opportunities for the participation of marginalized youth in political institutions by making the internet and technologies accessible to rural and other socially disadvantaged young people thus bridging the urban-rural divide of youth participation in civil and political processes.





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