

## MEMORANDUM

**To: Interested Colleagues**

**From: Ted Piccone, Executive Director, Democracy Coalition Project**

**Re: Mixed Results for UN Democracy Caucus at UN General Assembly**

**Date: January 10, 2005**

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The UN Democracy Caucus made progress at last fall's UN General Assembly by coordinating support for some resolutions on democracy and human rights. However, efforts to censure human rights violators like Zimbabwe, Sudan and Belarus were blocked by some Democracy Caucus states which abstained from voting or voted against resolutions critical of human rights abuses, a new assessment by the Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) shows.

The UN Democracy Caucus (UNDC) was convened for the first time in September 2004 by the Chilean foreign minister in her capacity as chair of the Community of Democracies, a forum for cooperation among democratic states to strengthen democratic practices around the world. The UNDC was formed to foster cooperation within the UN system to promote democratic governance and respect for human rights. Under Chile's leadership, members of the UNDC met on a regular basis during the fall session of the UNGA to exchange information and formally endorsed four thematic resolutions – on torture, cooperation among religions, regional cooperation to strengthen democracy, and women's status in the UN system.

A review of actual voting records on key country resolutions, however, demonstrates that there is little consensus among UNDC members to condemn even some of the worst violators of human rights, as some democratic governments continue to prioritize regional or north/south alliances when casting votes.

The Democracy Coalition Project survey, which is further detailed in the accompanying charts, compares the recorded votes of the 119 UN Democracy Caucus countries<sup>1</sup> for a total of seven relevant resolutions in the UNGA's Third Committee and Plenary sessions. The Third Committee resolutions include one thematic motion supporting democracy through regional organizations, and six country resolutions: on Belarus, Congo, Iran, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Zimbabwe, all of which condemned repeated violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Of these six country resolutions, three—Belarus, Sudan, and Zimbabwe— were defeated in the Third Committee through “no-action” motions introduced by **Russia** and **South Africa**, among others. Had these resolutions been successfully carried through to the GA Plenary, they would have expanded the number of states expressing concerns raised earlier in 2004 by the UN Human Rights Commission. The General Assembly did, however, take up resolutions on Congo, Iran, and Turkmenistan.

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the UNDC are those states invited to participate in the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies, held in Seoul, Korea in November, 2002.

In terms of voting records, **India, Mali, and South Africa**, which serve on the Community of Democracies steering committee, repeatedly chose to align themselves with non-democratic regimes by voting not to take action on highly abusive states or by abstaining. Other key nations belonging to the Community of Democracies, including **Brazil, Botswana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Russia**, voted against or abstained on important country resolutions. These UNDC countries consistently voted in support of “no action” on Belarus, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, or voted to abstain.

The Democracy Coalition Project’s comparative analysis of voting records illustrates the persistent propensity of many UN Democracy Caucus nations to avoid confronting regimes which blatantly violate democratic and human rights principles. DCP found that when voting in the Third Committee, 25 percent of democratic countries voted in favor of “no action” resolutions on Belarus and Sudan; an even higher 28 percent endorsed the “no action” resolution on Zimbabwe. On the other hand, over 70 percent of non-democratic regimes voted in favor of “no action” on Belarus, more than 85 percent endorsed “no action” on Sudan and 90 percent were in favor of the same motion for Zimbabwe.

Similarly, in December’s General Assembly sessions, a considerable number of democratic governments abstained from voting on resolutions condemning human rights violations in Congo, Iran, and Turkmenistan. For example, 39 percent, or 46 democratic regimes, abstained from voting on the Congo resolution, while 24 and 31 percent, respectively, abstained on Iran and Turkmenistan. Conversely, non-democratic countries voted nearly 100 percent against or to abstain on these country-specific motions.

Overall, DCP’s assessment illustrates the inclination among democratic regimes *not* to vote as a unified bloc for resolutions critical of human rights violations, but instead to continue to vote along regional and sub-regional lines. Non-democratic regimes, on the other hand, remain united against any move to erode the principle of “non-intervention in sovereign affairs,” regardless of the severity of the documented abuses against innocent civilians.

Contrary to the call by the Secretary General’s High Level Panel to extend membership on the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) to all member nations in order to expedite decision making, our analysis demonstrates a decreased chance for action to protect human rights when resolutions are brought before the full UN membership. For example, in April 2004, a majority of the 53-member UNHRC adopted a motion condemning human rights violations in Belarus. A similar motion, however, was defeated in the UNGA Third Committee, which has universal membership, despite the increasingly troublesome human rights situation in Belarus. A move to open the Human Rights Commission to all UN member states would further compromise the commission’s credibility and harm its ability to confront the most egregious human rights violators. Contrary to the High Level Panel’s recommendation, a coalition of NGOs have endorsed the importance of limiting UNHRC membership, for example, to include only

those countries which have ratified the main human rights conventions and cooperate with the Commission's investigators and special rapporteurs.<sup>2</sup>

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The Democracy Coalition Project is part of a coalition of leading international figures and NGOs that supports the establishment of a permanent democracy caucus at the United Nations. Such a caucus would enhance cooperation among democratic states in global and regional institutions, coordinate efforts to deepen respect for human rights and democracy, and support fragile emerging democracies, particularly those in the developing world. The campaign is particularly focused on the composition and activities of the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council, as well as decisions made by the UN General Assembly and Security Council.

**For more information about this campaign please call 202-721-5630, email [info@democracycaucus.net](mailto:info@democracycaucus.net), or visit <http://democracycaucus.net/html/home.html>.**

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<sup>2</sup> See *NGO Coalition Issues Statement on UNGA Resolutions and UN*, December 16, 2004, available at [http://democracycaucus.net/pdf/59unga\\_appeal\\_dec04.pdf](http://democracycaucus.net/pdf/59unga_appeal_dec04.pdf)