

## **Speech by Genaro Arriagada,**

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on the occasion of the opening of the Third Ministerial Conference.

During an important part of the 20th Century, democracy was a struggle against alternative political regimes that intended to challenge it in the terrain of ideas and results. It was a democracy threatened by the dictatorship of the proletariat set forth by real socialism. It was the brutal menace of fascism: direct, plebiscitarian, organic democracies, they told us. In Latin America, from the 60s to the 80s, it was the national security regimes, which spoke of authoritarian democracies and against the decadence of demoliberal institutions.

There are indeed reasons to celebrate. Democracy – as a project and as a concept – has triumphed above all the other alternative systems. But non governmental organizations (foundations, movements, parties), dedicated in all continents to the promotion and defense of democracy - and assembling at the Community of Democracies since 2000 - in addition to celebrating this fact, would like to draw attention on new realities and threats. I will refer to no more than three issues.

Firstly, it is true that democracy has triumphed as a concept and as an idea. But it is far from triumphing in reality. Applying some goodwill to the classification, there may be around 90 democracies in the world. However approximately 50 countries are dictatorships. And 40 more are on their way to becoming democracies but are not yet there. In many parts of the world, the essential political struggle still lies on the right to live; on not being imprisoned for expressing political opinions or for trying to form political parties; on daring to demand free elections or institute non-official newspapers. I will refer to one country per continent where this takes place: Burma in Asia; Sudan in Africa; Saudi Arabia in the Middle East; Belarus in Europe and Cuba in Latin America. In our meetings with non-governmental organizations that are concerned about this matter, we always have an apprehension: Are we being sufficiently solidarian with those who fight in those countries? Are we abandoning thousands of men and women who are risking their freedom, let alone their lives, to fight for democracy?

That is one issue. The second is that it is true that in countries with established democracy, unlike in the past, threats do not come from fascism, communism or national security regimes. Today, in most cases, the worst threats come from within. Democracy is threatened by imperfect Constitutions. By flawed electoral systems. By fragmented and discredited political parties. By a political culture that sees in democracy the rights that it grants, but not the obligations that it demands for its survival. Because, at times, we only take democracy's juridical structure, but not its spirit that supposes tolerance, respect, capacity to commit. In this regard, in our meetings we have repeatedly expressed the need for non-governmental organizations, especially political foundations and also multinational organizations, to multiply resources allocated to programs aimed to enhance political institutions, parties and culture.

A third issue that comes up in our meetings is the concern over the invitation criteria for participation in the Community of Democracies. Quite frankly, we are worried to see a repetition here of the bad experience of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. It is a known fact that two large groups are interested in becoming members of this Commission. One is made up of countries that in effect respect human rights and that approach it for noble and idealist motivations. But there is another group of governments, and among them the worst human rights violators, that want to participate in this Commission as a way to get out of being analyzed and condemned. Frankly speaking, it would be unfortunate to have two types of countries in the Community of Democracies. One, those who are in fact democracies and another that only want to participate in this pact as a way to conceal what they really are: dictatorships. In this sense, we have made concrete suggestions that we hope Ministers will take into account.

To conclude, on behalf of the non-governmental organizations that have participated in this process in Warsaw, later in Seoul, and in Santiago today, I must thank the widespread participation that governments have agreed to grant civil society at this meeting. This has been an outstanding and unprecedented fact, which we acknowledge and appreciate.