

## Seventh annual Athens Democracy Forum held with UNDEF and *New York Times*



The annual Athens Democracy Forum was held on 9-11 October 2019, in association with *The New York Times*, the UN Democracy Fund and the City of Athens.

This year's programme centred around the theme *Reinventing Democracy: New Models for our Changing World*, featuring discussions such as *We and Them: Why are the ideals of multiculturalism and inclusion so elusive, and so often held in disdain?*; *The Cost of Inequality: Can economic inequality be tempered without discouraging innovation and entrepreneurship?*; *Back to Basics: How can we restore faith in core values?*; *The Echo Chamber and the Agora: The use and misuse of new and social media*; and *The Collapse of the Traditional Party*. Venues included the Zappeion in the National Gardens of Athens; Old Parliament House – the first permanent base of the Greek National Assembly; the Acropolis Museum; and the Stoa of Attalos in the Ancient Agora of Athens – the very birthplace of democracy.

Speakers at the Forum included President of the Hellenic Republic H.E. Prokopios Pavlopoulos; President of the Republic of Ireland H.E. Michael D. Higgins; President of the Republic of Slovenia H.E. Borut Pahor; Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Kyriakos Mitsotakis;

Former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström; President of the European Council Donald Tusk; European Commissioner Margrethe Vestager; *New York Times* writers Roger Cohen and Steven Erlanger; Nigerian Nobel Literature Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka; and UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, whose remarks at the Zappeion can be read [here](#).

A closing debate, *Global vs. National*, featured a mano-a-mano between French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and former White House Chief Strategist Stephen Bannon.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres sent a message of support, which can be read [here](#).

*The New York Times* [article](#) on the event quoted Annika Savill as reminding the Forum that in large parts of the world, democracy “is a distant dream”. The *Times* added: “In an opening-night address, Ms. Savill said the word ‘democracy’ appeared nowhere in the United Nations Charter, and about half of the world’s countries ‘do not embrace it as a form of governance, or merely pay lip service to it.’”

The new Mayor of Athens, Kostas Bakoyannis, presented the annual City of Athens Democracy Award in memory of Pawel Adamowicz, the assassinated mayor of Gdansk. The award was accepted by Magdalena Adamowicz, Member of the European Parliament.

Annika Savill also spoke at a youth event on ‘Speak Truth to Power’ at the Benaki Museum of Islamic Art, along with philanthropist Marianna Vardinoyanni; Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights; and HRH Prince Nikolaos of Greece and Denmark. The event featured students from Greece, including the remote island of Kastellorizo, and young unaccompanied refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan, who all spoke of their understanding of human rights. Annika Savill’s remarks focused on inclusion and participation by vulnerable communities, and the engagement of youth in the urgent work towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Further information about the Forum can be found [here](#).



# Inclusion and Participation as Democracy's Foundations: UNDEF event marks the International Day of Democracy



The UN Democracy Fund joined forces with International IDEA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union on 16 September 2019 to mark the International Day of Democracy with an event at UN Headquarters focused on participation and inclusion. The observance addressed the upheavals that have taken place since the United Nations first observed the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2008, as well as the crucial relationship between democratic participation and the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres [said](#) in a video message to the event that democracy “is built on inclusion, equal treatment and participation — and it is a fundamental building block for peace, sustainable development and human rights”. Yet this “International Day of Democracy takes place at a time when trust is low and anxiety is high. People are frustrated by growing inequalities and unsettled by sweeping changes from globalization and technology. They see conflicts going unresolved, a climate emergency going unanswered, injustice going unaddressed, and civic space shrinking.” Watch and read the Secretary-General’s full message [here](#).

UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill [highlighted](#) the need for participation at all stages of decision-making, amidst the challenges of ethnic nationalism, shrinking civic space, threats to freedom of expression, attacks on elected representatives. “This Day is more than an observance,” she emphasized. “It is an opportunity to remind governments of the right to participation and inclusion in all phases of decision-making -- before, during and after.” Before decision-making, this meant a role in shaping the agenda of decision-making processes. During decision-making, this meant participation from an early stage, when all options were still open and on the table; for example, public authorities should refrain from taking any irreversible decisions or investments before the start of the process. After decision-making, it meant timely, comprehensive and transparent dissemination of information and channels that ensure all are heard. But, she added, less than four years after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on inclusive and participatory societies and institutions, some of its key principles were being challenged and undermined. “And in many countries, we are light years away from the kind of participation and inclusion I just described,” she warned. “Again, that means bringing

decision-making closer to the people. Updating our model of democracy through participation and inclusion. Listening carefully to the concerns of communities that feel threatened by change or left behind. Taking young people very seriously. Exploring new avenues beyond elections, such as citizen assemblies.” Read Annika Savill’s full remarks [here](#).



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A panel discussion with experts, parliamentarians and activists was moderated by Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA's Permanent Observer to the UN. He echoed the view that as democracy was an increasingly contested concept, it was all the more urgent to advance inclusion and participation through improved democratic processes and institutions.

Armend Bekaj, Senior Programme Officer for International IDEA, said the findings of International IDEA's Global State of Democracy indices indicated that public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms were under threat across all regions; that progress on Goal 16 was either in stagnation or in decline, especially in North America and Europe, both of which initially had a high score. View Armend Bekaj's presentation [here](#).

Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, one of the youngest Members of Canada's House of Commons, pointed to a rise of populism as a result of many feeling left out of economic progress and partisanship of elected officials. The way forward lay partly in educating people in how democracy works for them rather than the other way around, and encouraging young people to engage. "Not taking part in the world doesn't mean that it is going to stop happening, but that it would still happen without our say in it," he stressed.

Luisa Córdoba, Senior Director, Strategic Partnerships, for TECHO, [said](#) that as a Latin American regional organization, TECHO worked in urban settlements and slums with a mission for "fair society and inclusive cities that are free of poverty, where every person can exercise their duties, claim their rights, and seek opportunities to develop their capacities." She added that "UNDEF provided TECHO with support for a program to create a space for democratic community-level participation for slum dwellers in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, and Peru. And we are grateful for their commitment because we know that as inequality continues to rise, people living in slums will face stancher social, political, and

economic exclusion. Thanks to UNDEF's key support, today we run similar participation for across 60 cities in 19 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. This important UNDEF seed support allowed us to grow so that today we strengthen democratic and community-level participation not only of slum dwellers but of young citizens, young volunteers who are integral to our program, as well as of key stakeholders, for example, the private sector." To fight for equity and against corruption, TECHO would "continue to advocate for policy change and to promote community development aimed at strengthening grassroots leadership abilities and foster their understanding and active participation in civic duties." Read Luisa Córdoba's remarks [here](#).

Rebecca Aaberg, Inclusion Specialist at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, stressed the need for participation and inclusion of people with disabilities: "Fifteen per cent of the world's population has a disability and 60 percent of those are women. More so, 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in low-income countries where they do not even have the chance to participate in elections and for whom democracy is sometimes an unknown concept." View Rebecca Aaberg's presentation [here](#).

Paddy Torsney, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Permanent Observer to the UN, warned that "there is less participation across the world of people with a lower socioeconomic status or without any education, so we need to make sure we are getting the value of their opinions and participation not only for their own interest but for all of ours - they have good ideas and solutions too."

Questions and points from the floor focused on election obstruction, internet shutdowns, attacks on elected officials, electoral assistance, fragile states, data disaggregation needs on LGBTQI, and inclusion of displaced populations, whether political or economic migrants.





## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

## Strengthening Youth Engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina



UNDEF partner [Medijske Inicijative/Media Initiative](#) wrapped up its project “Strengthening Youth Activism on Anti-corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina” in February 2019. The two-year project worked with youth to raise awareness on issues of corruption and teach them advocacy skills to enable their participation in anti-corruption initiatives.

Corruption remains one of the key challenges to rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Anti-corruption Strategy, adopted by the Council of Ministers, has noted the need to raise public awareness, and promote citizen participation in the fight against corruption. This is particularly important for the young generations who receive little education on anti-corruption and its effects. The Council identified a specific need to encourage ethical behavior in children and young people through support of extracurricular projects of the civic sector.



In response to this issue, Medijske Inicijative implemented a series of trainings, and advocacy initiatives and produced informational materials to enable youth to conduct their own information and advocacy activities. In addition to trainings, the project established collaboration between youth, local authorities and international partners. Following these trainings, the trained young participants became part of ten Youth Anti-Corruption teams (pictured). These teams were responsible for youth-led anti-corruption advocacy initiatives such as production of media reports, tv show appearances, participating in social media competitions and monitoring public procurement and recruitment. One of the highlights of these activities were street actions and anti-corruption campaigns held on the International Anti-Corruption Day in Sarajevo and Banja Luka which were well attended and received local television coverage.





## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

## Youth Groups Contribute to Peaceful 2020 Elections in Burkina Faso



In Burkina Faso, a UNDEF's project "*Jeunesse et participation électorale au Burkina Faso*" is making strides towards boosting social mobilization and engagement of youth and women in the 2020 legislative and presidential elections. Implemented by civil society organization [l'Association Jeunesse Espoir d'Afrique](#), this project is working in five major cities towards improving biometric enrollment, raising social cohesion, and setting prevention measures against electoral conflicts in an effort to curb the low registration of young people on the electoral register, the social tension generated by the popular uprisings of 2014 to the political class, and rising electoral violence in Burkina Faso.

On June 21st, the project successfully held its first milestone event – a large public performance led by local comedians and artists to help raise awareness of peaceful electoral participation (pictured). Jaime Palacios, UNDEF Programme Officer attended the event in Ouagadougou (pictured). Around 500 persons attended the performance, of which most of them were women and youth. Participants have felt that the activities have been highly useful in raising their awareness for enrollment and cohesion of the necessity for Burkina Faso to achieve peaceful elections.

## Strengthening Human Rights Reporting in Mali

In June 2019, UNDEF partner, [Journalists for Human Rights](#) hosted a series of workshops to strengthen Malian media capacity as part of a project to enable journalists of Mali to hold their government accountable and to create a more effective, inclusive and transparent democracy that includes augmented freedom for the press.

UNDEF Programme Officer, Jaime Palacios took part in one of the Bamako-based workshops with 75 journalists that focused on coverage of human rights and good governance. Journalists were selected to take part in the workshop based on their previously displayed commitments to human rights coverage and reputation within the media sector. The curricula were adapted for the Malian context by Journalists for Human Rights from their vast experience in implementing trainings in countries with similar press freedom contexts. The training placed a heavy focus on data-driven reporting as an essential feature of eliminating bias and building credibility in stories regarding human rights issues.



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Promoting citizen's participation in Zimbabwe's democracy



On 11-12 July, The [Centre for Applied Legal Research](#), an UNDEF grantee, held its first milestone event, a two-day training workshop on constitutional reporting for media in Zimbabwe. Thirty-nine journalists (25 men and 14 women) participated in the training which focused on building skill sets to better report on constitutional issues and to promote public dialogue around these issues to create an open and transparent society. The workshop is one of the efforts under the project, “Promoting Citizen

Participation in Constitutional Discourse in Zimbabwe” which is working to address the challenges that the country is facing to fully implement key measures of its 2013 Constitution and in upholding the rule of law and increasing participation in democratic processes.

Training sessions in the workshop covered a range of topics designed to help journalists build their ability to identify, interpret and flag constitutional and rule of law issues in a partisan and timely manner. Interactive sessions included: constitutional principles, interpretation of the Declaration of Rights, structure of the state and government, independent commissions, the law-making process, devolution and public administration and the constitution. The training was well received by participants, many of whom publicized its value on their social media. Media house Sky Metro FM and MISAZimbabwe further highlighted the important role of the media in reporting on constitutional matters on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

### Strengthening community policing in Kenya

The UNDEF-funded project “Youth and Women Participation in Community Policing in Kenya” is mobilizing women and youth to participate in community security initiatives, and advocate for the respect of human rights standards and gender responsiveness in their security. Security challenges such as crime and violent extremism are rising in the country, disproportionately affecting minorities and vulnerable groups. The project designed by The [Institute for Social Accountability](#) and implemented in partnership with the Independent Medico Legal Unit and the Convener of the Police Reform Working Group works to address these challenges.

Following a national police service training in 2018, follow up trainings on community policing have been held in the counties of Nairobi, Baringo and Isiolo. These activities informed participants on their rights and responsibilities around security as well as roles and responsibilities of security institutions in respect to human rights and gender principles. Trainings prepared community members to represent their communities in security panels at the sub-county level.

Interactive training sessions encouraged community members to express their concern regarding progress and challenges they face in community security and to



share their experiences. Information was disseminated to familiarize community members on new police structures and policies, best practices in handling confidential information, and community policing activities. Participants shared insights and noted follow-up actions that came out of the sessions. These incremental trainings have helped to strengthen the relationship between key security players and community members, critical in their cooperation to ensure community security.