

## **A Call to Defend Democracy**

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens more than the lives and the livelihoods of people throughout the world. It is also a political crisis that threatens the future of liberal democracy.

Authoritarian regimes, not surprisingly, are using the crisis to silence critics and tighten their political grip. But even some democratically elected governments are fighting the pandemic by amassing emergency powers that restrict human rights and enhance state surveillance without regard to legal constraints, parliamentary oversight, or timeframes for the restoration of constitutional order. Parliaments are being sidelined, journalists are being arrested and harassed, minorities are being scapegoated, and the most vulnerable sectors of the population face alarming new dangers as the economic lockdowns ravage the very fabric of societies everywhere.

Repression will not help to control the pandemic. Silencing free speech, jailing peaceful dissenters, suppressing legislative oversight, and indefinitely canceling elections all do nothing to protect public health. On the contrary, these assaults on freedom, transparency, and democracy will make it more difficult for societies to respond quickly and effectively to the crisis through both government and civic action.

It is not a coincidence that the current pandemic began in a country where the free flow of information is stifled and where the government punished those warning about the dangers of the virus—warnings that were seen as spreading rumors harmful to the prestige of the state. When voices of responsible citizens are suppressed, the results can be deadly, not for just one country but for the entire world.

Democracy is not just a cherished ideal. It is the system of government best suited to addressing a crisis of the magnitude and complexity of COVID-19. In contrast to the self-serving claims of authoritarian propaganda, credible and free flows of information, fact-based debate about policy options, the voluntary self-organization of civil society, and open engagement between government and society are all vital assets in combating the pandemic. And they are all key elements of liberal democracy.

It is only through democracy that societies can build the social trust that enables them to persevere in a crisis, maintain national resilience in the face of hardship, heal deep societal divisions through inclusive participation and dialogue, and retain confidence that sacrifice will be shared and the rights of all citizens respected.

It is only through democracy that independent civil society, including women and young people, can be empowered to partner with public institutions, to assist in the delivery of services, to help citizens stay informed and engaged, and to bolster social morale and a sense of common purpose.

It is only through democracy that free media can play their role of informing people so that they can make sound personal and family decisions, scrutinize government and public institutions, and counter disinformation that seeks to tear societies apart.

It is only through democracy that society can strike a sustainable balance between competing needs and priorities – between combatting the spread of the virus and protecting economic security; and

between implementing an effective response to the crisis and protecting people's civil and political rights in accordance with constitutional norms and guarantees.

It is only in democracies that the rule of law can protect individual liberties from state intrusion and constraint well beyond what is necessary to contain a pandemic.

It is only in democracies that systems of public accountability can monitor and circumscribe emergency government powers and terminate them when they are no longer needed.

It is only in democracies that government data on the scope and health-impact of the pandemic can be believed.

Democracy does not guarantee competent leadership and effective governance. While democracies predominate among the countries that have acted most effectively to contain the virus, other democracies have functioned poorly in responding to the pandemic and have paid a very high price in human life and economic security. Democracies that perform poorly further weaken society and create openings for authoritarians.

But the greatest strength of democracy is its capacity for self-correction. The COVID-19 crisis is an alarming wake-up call, an urgent warning that the freedoms we cherish are at risk and that we must not take them for granted. Through democracy, citizens and their elected leaders can learn and grow. Never has it been more important for them to do that.

The current pandemic represents a formidable global challenge to democracy. Authoritarians around the world see the COVID-19 crisis as a new political battleground in their fight to stigmatize democracy as feeble and reverse its dramatic gains of the past few decades. Democracy is under threat, and people who care about it must summon the will, the discipline, and the solidarity to defend it. At stake are the freedom, health, and dignity of people everywhere.

## List of signatories

### Organisations

- African Movement for Democracy
- African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL)
- Alinaza Universitaria Nicaraguense (AUN)
- Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center
- Alliance of Democracies Foundation
- Asia Democracy Network
- Asian Network For Free Elections (ANFREL)
- Association Béninoise de Droit Constitutionnel (ABDC)
- Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT)
- Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)
- Christian Democratic International Center
- Coalition for Dialogue in Africa (CODA)
- Colectivo Ciudadano Ecuador
- Council for Global Equality
- Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)
- Democracy International
- Democracy Reporting International (DRI)
- European Endowment for Democracy
- European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Forum 2000
- Freedom House
- Fundación Nuevas Generaciones
- Fundación Paraguaya de Cooperación y Desarrollo
- Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES)
- Human Rights Campaign
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Institute for Democratic Governance
- Instituto Venezolano de Estudios Sociales y Políticos (INVESP)
- International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)
- International IDEA
- International Republican Institute
- JuventudLAC
- Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
- National Democratic Institute
- National Endowment for Democracy
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- Parliamentary Center of Canada
- PAX for Peace International

- PEN America
- Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland
- Prague Civil Society Centre
- Program on Democratic Resilience and Development, IDC Herzliya
- Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
- Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe por la Democracia (REDLAD)
- Solidarity Center
- Swedish International Liberal Center (SILC)
- Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
- The Carter Center
- The Center Party's International Foundation (CIS)
- The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA)
- The Foreign Policy Centre
- The George W. Bush Institute
- The Inter American Institute of Human Rights (IIDH)
- The International Democrat Union (IDU)
- The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
- The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Organization
- The Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation
- The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)
- The McCain Institute for International Leadership
- The Nadav Foundation
- The Oslo Center
- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida
- Transparency International
- Unión de Partidos Latinoamericanos (UPLA)
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- West Africa Civil Society Institute
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<b>GOZMAN</b>	<b>Leonid</b>	President, Union of Right Forces (SPS)	Russia
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<b>GUÉHENNO</b>	<b>Jean-Marie</b>	Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations	France
<b>GUSENBAUER</b>	<b>Alfred</b>	Former Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria	Austria
<b>H.R.</b>	<b>MCMASTER</b>	Former United States National Security Advisor; Senior Fellow, the Hoover Institution, Stanford University; Member of Board of Directors, the Atlantic Council	USA
<b>HABIB</b>	<b>Adam</b>	Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg	South Africa
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<b>HART</b>	<b>Gary</b>	Former United States Senator	USA
<b>HARUTYUNYAN</b>	<b>Haykuhi</b>	Chairperson, Corruption Prevention Commission	Armenia
<b>HARYMURTI</b>	<b>Bambang</b>	Former CEO and Editor in Chief, Tempo Magazine	Indonesia
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<b>HŘIB</b>	<b>Zdeněk</b>	Mayor of Prague	Czech Republic
<b>HURTADO</b>	<b>Oswaldo</b>	Former President of Ecuador	Ecuador
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<b>LAFER</b>	<b>Celso</b>	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil; Former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil to the World Trade Organization and the United Nations	Brazil
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<b>LAMBERTZ</b>	<b>Karl-Heinz</b>	Speaker of the Parliament of the German-Speaking Community; Former President of the European Committee of the Regions; Former Minister-President of the German-Speaking Community of Belgium	Belgium
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<b>LEE</b>	<b>Hong-koo</b>	Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea	Republic of Korea
<b>LEE</b>	<b>Martin</b>	Founder, Democratic Party	Hong-Kong
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<b>MADONSELA</b>	<b>Thuli</b>	Former Public Protector of South Africa; Founder, Thuma Foundation for Democracy Leadership and Literacy	South Africa
<b>MAGYAR</b>	<b>Bálint</b>	Former Minister of Education of Hungary	Hungary
<b>MALCORRA</b>	<b>Susana</b>	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina; Former Chef de Cabinet to the Executive Office at the United Nations	Argentina
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<b>MALMSTRÖM</b>	<b>Cecilia</b>	Former Member of the European Commission; Visiting Professor, the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg	Sweden
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<b>MARGVELASHVILI</b>	<b>Giorgi</b>	Former President of Georgia	Georgia
<b>MARQUES DE MORAIS</b>	<b>Rafael</b>	Founder, Maka Angola	Angola
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<b>MECKEL</b>	<b>Markus</b>	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member of the Bundestag	Germany
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<b>MEISTER</b>	<b>Stefan</b>	Director, South Caucasus Office, Heinrich Boell Foundation	Germany
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<b>MERIDOR</b>	<b>Dan</b>	Former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel and Minister of Finance	Israel
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<b>MESA</b>	<b>Carlos</b>	Former President of Bolivia	Bolivia
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<b>PUDDINGTON</b>	<b>Arch</b>	Distinguished Fellow for Democracy Studies and Former Editor, Survey of Freedom in the World, Freedom House; Writer with publications in Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, National Interest, and Journal of Democracy	USA
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<b>RADICOVA</b>	<b>Iveta</b>	Former Prime Minister of Slovakia	Slovakia
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<b>RIFKIND</b>	<b>Malcolm</b>	Former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	United Kingdom
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<b>RUDD</b>	<b>Kevin</b>	Former Prime Minister of Australia; Member, the Global Leadership Foundation	Australia
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<b>RUPNIK</b>	<b>Jacques</b>	Professor, Center for International Studies at SciencesPo in Paris	France
<b>SAIF</b>	<b>Ibrahim</b>	Former Minister of Energy and Minister of Planning of Jordan	Jordan
<b>SALEM</b>	<b>Walid</b>	Palestinian Intellectual	Palestine
<b>SANDU</b>	<b>Maia</b>	Former Prime Minister of Moldova	Moldova
<b>SANGAY</b>	<b>Lobsang</b>	President, Central Tibet Administration	Tibet
<b>SANTOS</b>	<b>Juan Manuel</b>	Nobel Peace Laureate and Former President of Colombia	Colombia
<b>SARLO</b>	<b>Beatriz</b>	Journalist	Argentina
<b>SAUNDERS</b>	<b>Cheryl</b>	Laureate Emeritus Professor, Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne; Former Vice Chair of International IDEA Board of Advisors	Australia
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<b>SEWANYANA</b>	<b>Livingstone</b>	Executive Director, the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative; UN Independent Expert on Promoting a Democratic and Equitable International Order	Uganda
<b>SE-YEON</b>	<b>Kim</b>	Member of National Assembly of the Republic of Korea	Republic of Korea
<b>SHAHINIAN</b>	<b>Gulnara</b>	Founder and Chair, Democracy Today	Armenia
<b>SHAMSULDDIN</b>	<b>Sarkawt</b>	Member of Parliament	Iraq
<b>SHARANSKY</b>	<b>Natan</b>	Former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel and Minister of Housing and Construction	Israel
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<b>SORMAN</b>	<b>Guy</b>	President, France-Amerique	France
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<b>TÜTTŐ</b>	<b>Kata</b>	Deputy Mayor of Budapest	Hungary

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<b>WILL</b>	<b>George</b>	Writer and Columnist	USA
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<b>WU</b>	<b>Joseph</b>	Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China	Taiwan
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<b>YUNUS</b>	<b>Muhammad</b>	Nobel Laureate for Literature; Founder, Grameen Bank	Bangladesh
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<b>ZAKHAROV</b>	<b>Yevgeniy</b>	Founder, Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group	Ukraine
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		Defense Strategy of the United States; Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense	
<b>ZAKHEIM</b>	<b>Dov S.</b>	Former Under Secretary of Defense	USA
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