

UN Democracy Fund

“Because I believe the advance of liberty is the path to both a safer and better world, today I propose establishing a Democracy Fund within the United Nations. This is a great calling for this great organization...To show our commitment to the new Democracy Fund, the United States will make an initial contribution.”
~ President George W. Bush, UN General Assembly, September 21, 2004

What is the Democracy Fund?

In the fall of 2004, President Bush addressed the UN General Assembly, proposing the creation of a United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF). This bold, new initiative would provide funding and technical assistance to budding democracies that often lack the resources and expertise necessary to build a well-functioning democracy.

Nations could apply for grants on projects to build civil society, strengthen the rule of law, establish political parties and independent courts, or develop free press and trade unions. Money from the Democracy Fund could also be used to set up voter precincts and polling places, and support the work of election monitors in protecting against fraud and illegitimacy.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan quickly endorsed the proposal, acknowledging its importance in his report “In Larger Freedom,” and urged the international community to “welcome the creation of a Democracy Fund at the United Nations.”

How would the Democracy Fund work?

The exact structure and makeup of the Democracy Fund have not yet been finalized. As it presently stands, any country, non-governmental organization or UN body may apply for funding, with proposals weighed on their merits. Supporting the Secretary-General’s repeated assertion that democracy does not belong to any single country or region, successful proposals will not be limited to a single model of democracy.

The Fund will coordinate closely with other UN bodies to avoid duplication of funding efforts. That is why the review of applications and recommendations to the Advisory Board will be handled by the relevant bodies, such as the Department of Political Affairs, the UN Development Fund and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The aim is to create plenty of checks and balances to make sure the Democracy Fund is run effectively, flexible and open for input. The UN Secretary General will be the final decision maker on any distributions of grants from the Fund.

Currently, plans for the Democracy Fund structure includes:

The existing *UN Fund for International Partnerships* will be the administrative ‘house’ of the fund, collecting grant applications, distributing grant money, publicizing the Fund, and other related duties.

An **Advisory Board** will be the main body of the Democracy Fund. It will be comprised of the 6 top donors to the Fund, donors with unique experiences in the field, 3 UN officials chosen from appropriate agencies, and representatives from two Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on democracy promotion internationally.

A **Programme Consultative Board**, composed of up to 7 heads of UN system organizations, will provide expert advice on project proposals. The board will also help prevent effort duplication between agencies.

A **Donors Group** will meet at least once a year. Every donor to the Fund will have a seat in this group and have a say in how the Democracy Fund works. It also encourages countries who want to be recipients of grants to give symbolic donations.

World Summit 2005

The Democracy Fund will be funded on a voluntary basis. As a gesture of America's dedication to the new Fund, President Bush promised to make an initial contribution and asked Congress to appropriate \$10 million for this purpose.

From September 14-16, the United Nations hosted the largest gathering of world leaders in history who came together to collectively strengthen the United Nations for the 21st century. During the summit, more than 150 heads of states endorsed the Democracy Fund. Along with the United States, Australia, Chile, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Mauritius, Portugal, Qatar, Senegal, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom have pledged to contribute to the Fund.

It is important that the U.S. Congress meet President Bush's pledge. Failure to contribute to the Democracy Fund, an initiative President Bush created and pledged to support, will damage America's credibility abroad at a crucial time for U.S. foreign policy interests.

About Citizens for Global Solutions

Citizens for Global Solutions envisions a future in which nations work together to abolish war, protect our rights and freedoms, and solve the problems facing humanity that no nation can solve alone. This vision requires effective democratic global institutions that will apply the rule of law while respecting the diversity and autonomy of national and local communities. We work to build political will for our vision in the United States by educating Americans about our global interdependence, communicating global concerns to public officials, and developing proposals to create, reform, and strengthen international institutions such as the United Nations.

For more information on this paper contact Citizens for Global Solutions Executive Vice-President, Don Kraus, at dkraus@globalsolutions.org or 202-546-3950 ext. 103. Simon Weber, Government Relations Associate, at Citizens for Global Solutions, was the paper's lead writer.