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World Movement for Democracy - A Citizen's Movement Promoting Democracy Worldwide

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3

THE WORLD MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY CONVENED its Third Assembly on 1-4 February 2004 at the International Convention Center in Durban, South Africa. Around the theme "Building Democracy for Peace, Development, and Human Rights", the third assembly gathered over 600 democracy activists, practitioners, and scholars from 125 countries across all regions of the world to discuss practical solutions to a wide range of problems confronting democracy.

Participating countries spanned the range of what may be considered open and closed societies. These included Burma, China, Russia, Belarus, Serbia, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Palestine, Iraq, Mongolia, Burma, Tibet, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and the United States.

As politically diverse as the countries they came from, the assembly participants themselves represented a

variety of persuasions. There were anti-communist democrats, democrats with socialist sympathies, pro (?) and anti-Bush democrats, and so on. One mission bound them in common: promotion of democracy everywhere.

What democracy? While there may not be an end to debates around what sort of democracy people are talking about, the global consensus seems to converge around the following norms: a free press; respect for fundamental civil and political rights; universal and equal suffrage; periodic multiparty elections that are free and fair; an elected parliament; an independent judiciary; civilian and democratic control of the armed forces; and transparent and accountable governance.

There are two most recent references for this definition. One is the Warsaw Declaration adopted in June 2000 by 110 governments participating in the first ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies. This community is a mixed bag. The other is the Resolution on Promoting and Consolidating Democracy adopted by the UN General Assembly in late 2000. Likewise, this UN body is also a mix of democratic and authoritarian states and governments.

The WMD third assembly was designed like a big tent where participants met in workshops of their choice (done long before the assembly) and interacted freely. As a rule, the assembly itself does not issue a common declaration. Some groups may choose to come out with statements and petitions in their name and campaign for sign-on.

In more than 40 workshops, participants explored how to expand and strengthen democracy in their countries and in their regions of the world; how to strengthen civic groups, political parties and the media; how to increase accountability of political institutions; and how to use civic education and culture as a means of promoting democratic values. Other areas of discussion included increasing women's participation, the challenges of working in conflict-ridden societies, transitional justice, among others.

The WMD third assembly was organized with the support of three South African partner organizations—the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD, www.accord.org.za), the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS, www.cps.org.za), and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA, www.idasa.org.za).

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the World Movement's Democracy Courage Tributes at the John B. Hurford Memorial Dinner on February 4. The recipients were the Democracy Movement in Sudan;



the Mano River Union Civil Society Movement; the Democracy Movement in Belarus; and two groups working for reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) and the Panorama Center.

The Democracy Courage Tributes, initiated at the Second World Assembly in Sao Paulo, Brazil, pays homage to democracy activists and movements around the world working on behalf of democracy and human rights under particularly difficult circumstances and often outside the spotlight of world attention. John Boyce Hurford (1938-2000) was an internationalist and philanthropist on whose name was created the Foundation that supports democracy activists and gives tributes to the most courageous among them.

The World Movement for Democracy is a global network that meets periodically to exchange ideas and experiences and uses new information and communication technologies to foster collaboration among democratic forces around the world. It was initiated by the National Endowment for Democracy, an institution based in Washington, D.C. created by the US Congress.

Here's how the World Movement for Democracy locates itself. It claims to offer a new and practical way of helping democrats around the world in their struggle to liberalize authoritarian systems and consolidate emerging democracies by serving as:

- (a) an **ally** of democrats in dangerous situations who need political solidarity and moral support;
- (b) a **lobby** for the cause of democracy in international bodies and in countries where democracy is under siege;
- (c) a **big tent** that can provide a meeting place for democrats who are active in different professional areas such as human rights, law, political party development. Workers' rights, economic reform, research) and education;
- (d) a **monitor** that can convey the views of democratic activists on the efficacy of different forms of democratic support;
- (e) a **facilitator** that can help link democrats from different countries and regions to exchange information more efficiently, work together, and help one another;
- (f) an **innovator** that can encourage the development of new ideas and effective approaches for overcoming obstacles to democracy;
- (g) a **catalyst** to stimulate new initiatives and help shape the priorities of the broader community of institutions concerned with the promotion of democracy; and



- (h) a **resource center** that can make basic materials available to groups around the world.

The launching assembly held in February 1999 in New Delhi, India brought together 400 democracy advocates from more than 80 countries coming from NGOs, civic education groups, business associations, anti-corruption groups, trade unions, political parties, think tanks, democracy-support foundations. The participants adopted a founding statement about its mission to “strengthen democracy where it is weak, to reform and invigorate democracy even where it is longstanding, and to bolster pro-democracy groups in countries that have not yet entered into a process of democratic transition.”

The second assembly in November 2000 in Sao Paulo, Brazil drew 400 activists, practitioners and scholars from around the world to share experiences in building democracy at the grassroots level and to formulate steps the international community can take to meet the challenges of democracy in the 21st century. Thematic, regional, and functional workshops addressed issues and concerns critical to democracy work. These included research, ICT, local governance, civic education, women’s political participation, democracy assistance, and the role of young democracy activists.

The World Movement is governed by a distinguished international Steering Committee, and the Washington, DC-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) currently serves as its Secretariat. Contact details:

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About the author

Isagani R. Serrano is Senior Vice President and Board Member of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). He's written for CIVICUS the following: *Civil Society in the Asia-Pacific*, 1994; *Humanity In Trouble But Hopeful* in CITIZENS, 1995; *Profile: Philippines* for CIVIC INDEX, 1997; *Coming Apart, Coming Together* in Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium, 1999; *A Global Citizens' Commitment*, 1999. A community organizer, educator, writer, guitarist, 'farmer', and political prisoner for seven years during martial law in the Philippines. Trained in education and literature, community organization and development management. Holds a Master of Science in Environment & Development Education (MSc in EE/DE) from the South Bank University-London.

