STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS PANEL
Report to the Community of Democracies Non-Governmental Forum
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Chair:
Genaro Arriagada (Former Ambassador, Chile)

Panelists:
Emma Bonino (Member of European Parliament, Italy)
Bi-khim Hsiao (Member of Parliament, Taiwan)
Pande Lazarevski (Executive Director for Political, Social & Legal Research in Macedonia)
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Sam Rainsy (Member of Parliament, Cambodia)
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Political parties form the cornerstone of democratic society and serve a function unlike any other institution. They aggregate and represent social interests; provide a structure for political participation; train political leaders who will assume roles in governing societies; and contest and win elections to seek a measure of control in government institutions.

In many areas of the world today, however, political parties are facing a crisis of public confidence due to their organizational and political shortcomings. Parties are perceived as ineffective, corrupt and out-of-touch with their constituencies. They lack credibility and often fail to attract young leadership to their ranks. At the same time, support has risen for independent candidates, special interest parties and anti-party movements. This crisis poses a dire threat to democratic development.

Political party building, an often misunderstood and underutilized element of democracy building, must become a central issue among the worldwide network of pro-democracy activists, elected leaders and scholars.

The goal of the "Strengthening Political Party Systems" panel was to address the primary challenges facing political parties and political party systems. The panel provided an opportunity to heighten awareness of political parties and the key role they play in democratic development, and aimed to identify measures that will strengthen parties and promote more inclusive and participatory political systems.

The panel discussion focused on the difficulties faced by political parties and explored:

- ways of bringing about change;

- measures that can be taken to address the decline in political parties;

- a means to create more open and responsive political parties that will strive to promote increased participation by citizenry in the democratic process;

- creating a greater emphasis on political party development and on the role that political leaders play in the democratization process;

- how to engage political practitioners in ways to support struggling democrats in autocratic environments and closed societies, and to better utilize contacts in problematic countries in order to encourage constructive activities or behavior on the part of political leaders; and

- ensuring that political party development in new and emerging democracies has sufficient resources allocated to it by the international donor community.

THE PANEL RECOMMENDS TO THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES THAT THERE NEEDS TO BE:

Engagement with political parties and party leaders.

The Community of Democracies and other global and regional conferences need to reach out to political parties through the political party international organizations and party foundations.

There is a need to create an environment for greater interaction between political parties and civil society organizations.

Recognition and support from multilateral organizations.

Organizations such as the World Bank, the UNDP and the IMF should adopt measures that support political party systems. While supporting economic development and good governance, political systems are often neglected.

Support for programs that build professional capacity in political parties is especially crucial.

Public financing of political parties.

Public financing for political parties promotes a fairer political system. It also leads to greater transparency and accountability while curtailing corruption.

Internal democracy.

Parties need to become more internally democratic and open decision-making processes to their members. This is particularly important in the election of leaders and the selection of candidates.

Establishment of criteria for determining the democratic nature of political parties.

A comprehensive study of political parties should be undertaken to establish a set of universally accepted guiding principles and norms for truly democratic parties.

The sharing of best practices.

There are many valuable experiences in the modernization and renewal of political parties. These lessons should be documented and published to assist other parties around the world facing similar challenges.