

## What's Next?

# Young People's Role in Promoting Democracy

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SECOND SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY



Young people worldwide are on the frontlines of defending democracy, however, they must be given the tools and the space to lead. Despite facing repression, exclusion, and aggression, their resilience and innovative thinking prevail. Through the “What’s Next for Youth and Democracy” side event, recommendations for ensuring meaningful youth participation and inclusion were co-created and shared among young people of diverse identities and backgrounds, and their supporters from around the world. By embracing these recommendations, young people and their allies can initiate transformative change, champion democratic ideals, and ensure governments remain accountable to their constituents. More information on the side event can be found at the end of the document.

- **Young people can and should be elevated as leaders in the fight against authoritarianism.**

Attempts to challenge authoritarian regimes will almost always be met with aggression. Nonetheless, youth continue to harness their passion and skills to strengthen democracy in the face of rising authoritarianism. The Summit for Democracy in Costa Rica created a space for young people to discuss their lived realities, underscoring the strategic imperative of empowering young people from both democratic and non-democratic countries to lead the charge in safeguarding democratic values.

At the side event "What's Next for Youth and Democracy," young leaders emphasized the crucial role youth must play in the fight against authoritarianism. For example, a Cuban human rights activist showcased her struggle for justice and liberty in Cuba during the event. Through her account of protests led by political prisoners, she underscored the vital role of young people in challenging authoritarian forces through collective action and building a powerful, diverse social movement.

- **Governments need to ensure greater youth representation in decision-making processes at all levels.**

Governments and civil society allies worldwide are recognizing the importance of engaging young people in policy development and implementation. One example of this was discussed by panelist Željko Vukša-Fejzić, a Generation Democracy Board member from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who has actively worked to create platforms and mechanisms for meaningful youth participation.

Željko's achievements include facilitating the first-ever parliamentary session on youth in the canton of Sarajevo, a groundbreaking event that opened doors for young people to voice their concerns and contribute to decision-making processes. His efforts also played a pivotal role in the adoption of the youth strategy at the cantonal level, ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the youth are reflected in forthcoming policy decisions.



Governments also need to establish avenues for intergenerational dialogue that provide meaningful opportunities for communities to develop a collective political discourse. As explained by Elyes Guermazi from Tunisia during the event, through a International Institute of Debate (iiDebate) program, he created a space for young people to express their opinions and engage in political discourse with decision-makers. By facilitating cross generational, open dialogue around one table, Tunisian youth became active participants in shaping their own future.

- **Governments must support youth-led and youth-serving organizations to ensure sustainable, democratic progress.**

Only by creating opportunities where young people in all their diversity can have decision-making power and meaningful input on political and socio-economic challenges in their communities, can youth truly engage in governance. Therefore, underpinning all of these recommendations is strong support – including technical and financial resources – for youth-led and youth-serving organizations.

Government and the private sector must work together to empower youth to participate in their local economies and lay the foundation for collective action on a global scale. Training and skills development, business incubators, and public-private partnerships to provide young entrepreneurs with funding and mentoring are a few of the critical investments required for harnessing youth-led innovation.

The Generation Democracy Network – a global youth network led by a group of 12 young people from 12 countries – also serves as a prime example of how to meaningfully include youth in both network management and the democratic process. By providing a platform for youth political participation and amplifying the impact of youth-led initiatives, the Network has helped bridge the gap between citizens and policymakers, leading to the implementation of young people's ideas in governance.



## **Remarks by Željko Vukša-Fejzić** **IRI, NDI and CIPE Designated Spokesperson**

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a member of the Generation Democracy Board representing Europe and serving as the designated spokesperson for IRI, NDI, and the Center for International Private Enterprise, I am honored to address you today and share the recommendations that have emerged from our side event at the Summit for Democracy held in Costa Rica.

These recommendations center around the crucial need to empower and engage youth in the battle against authoritarianism. Despite facing aggression, young people exhibit unwavering resilience, boundless energy, and innovative thinking that triumphs against all odds. The Summit resoundingly emphasized the urgent importance of recognizing and empowering young leaders from both democratic and non-democratic nations, acknowledging their indispensable role in upholding the cherished value of freedom.

During the "What's Next for Youth and Democracy" side event, passionate, young individuals and their supporters collaborated to craft recommendations that seek to ensure the meaningful participation of youth. By embracing these recommendations, our youth can ignite a wave of transformative change, fiercely champion democratic ideals, and effectively hold governments accountable to their constituents' aspirations. Authoritarian regimes are notorious for their aggressive responses to challenges, yet young people continue to astound us by harnessing their boundless energy, passion, and innovative thinking to build resilience that knows no bounds.

To truly foster meaningful youth participation, it is imperative that governments advocate for increased representation of young people in decision-making processes at all levels. Their voices must be heard, their perspectives valued, and their contributions appreciated.

Moreover, governments must proactively establish platforms for intergenerational dialogues, creating authentic opportunities for communities to foster a collective political discourse. By embracing open, inclusive conversations that bridge generational gaps, we can nurture a stronger democracy where diverse voices harmoniously shape the future.

Furthermore, it is incumbent upon governments to provide unwavering support to youth-led and serving organizations, ensuring sustainable democratic progress. By equipping these organizations with the necessary technical, financial, and personal resources, we empower young people to take ownership of the political and socio-economic challenges that exist within their communities, fostering an environment where their potential thrives.



Allow me to proudly highlight the Generation Democracy Network, a dynamic global youth network that exemplifies meaningful youth inclusion in both network management and the democratic process.

In conclusion, I implore each and every one of us to wholeheartedly embrace the empowerment of our youth and their meaningful participation in the battle against authoritarianism. By endorsing and implementing these recommendations that have emerged from the Summit for Democracy, and supporting youth-led initiatives, we can forge a path towards a more democratic, inclusive, and equitable future. Let us proudly stand together as we empower the next generation to lead with purpose and character.

Thank you.

### About the Event:

To complement the second Summit for Democracy (S4D2) on the theme of youth and the role of the younger population in the political processes of democratic systems, the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) co-led a side-event to highlight how young people have been and can continue to promote democracy within their communities and countries. The workshop was structured around the World Movement for Democracy's (WMD) publication What's Next - in particular, looking at the "common goals for the youth vision for democracy" that are aligned with the S4D pillars, including how young people have expanded inclusive civic spaces; countered disinformation to create a healthy ecosystem of information; and fostered citizen-centered accountability and transparent governance.



Photographs from the Side Event



## **Organizational Backgrounds:**

IRI, NDI and CIPE are core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), founded in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan and the United States Congress to foster the infrastructure of democracy around the world.

IRI strengthens democracy by empowering citizens, bolstering democratic governance, and making leaders more accountable to their people. For 40 years, IRI has helped activists and elected officials foster healthy democratic competition, increase transparency and accountability in government decision-making, and promote inclusivity in civic and political life. Through International Republican Institute's (IRI) flagship youth network, Generation Democracy, over 280 members and 50 alumni from more than 80 countries have access to opportunities that increase their capacity to effectively mobilize young people, champion democratic reform, as well as tackle barriers to meaningful youth participation to build more resilient, responsive, and inclusive democracies.

NDI is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all. NDI supports young people to channel their energy, creativity and aspirations and become political leaders and activists. Programs build young people's skills, knowledge and confidence while helping them more effectively express their voices, build relationships with political leaders and break down sociocultural and institutional barriers to participation.

Since 1983, CIPE has been working with local partners to craft business-driven solutions to socio-economic problems that affect millions of people. CIPE believes that democracy is at its strongest when the private sector is flourishing. Working with local partners that include business associations, chambers of commerce, think tanks, universities, and advocacy organizations, CIPE advances the voice of business in policy making, promotes opportunity, and develops resilient and inclusive economies. CIPE currently has more than 200 projects in over 80 countries to strengthen democracy and build competitive markets.