

What Is Democracy? A Panel Discussion
Conference Room 2, United Nations, New York
15 July 2019 at 3pm

Background

The global debate on democracy is increasingly marked by distrust of democratic institutions, processes and elected representatives. Yet with Sustainable Development Goal 16, a global effort is underway to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. This presents an opportunity on the sidelines of the 2019 UN Economic and Social Council ministerial segment to step up engagement around advancing Goal 16, and to encourage a thematic discussion of democracy: that while there is no one-size-fits-all model of democracy, and each country must find the model that works for its circumstances, there are fundamental characteristics these models need in common to qualify as democracies.

Objectives

- Provide a platform to bring together UN, Member States, academia and civil society to focus on what constitutes the core elements and benchmarks of a true democracy, while encouraging a more constructive debate than merely reiterating the ways in which democracy is under strain.
- Demonstrate that democracy is a global good for people, including by bringing in diverse actors.
- Organize the event on the margins of the ministerial-level segment of ECOSOC, so as to feed into and inform an inter-governmental process.
- Contribute to an encouraging environment for work towards Sustainable Development Goal 16 and showcase the contribution of UNDEF in engaging civil society to achieve this.

Format and Participation

The 90-minute event will be convened by UNDEF, in partnership with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, as a side event to the ECOSOC ministerial-level segment the week starting 15 July 2019. Held in one of the large UN conference rooms, it will start with brief opening remarks by the Executive Head of the UN Democracy Fund, who will introduce a keynote speech by the UN Deputy Secretary-General, followed by the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. A panel discussion will follow, bringing together eminent experts:

- **Mr. Jay Naidoo**, founding General Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions; Former Minister for Reconstruction in President Mandela's first Cabinet; Board member of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation;
- **Ms. Jyotsna Mohan Singh**, Regional Coordinator, Asia Development Alliance; Member, Steering Committee of the Transparency, Accountability & Participation Network for the 2030 Agenda
- **Dr. Thomas Carothers**, Senior Vice-President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Author, *Development Aid Confronts Politics* and *In the Name of Democracy*
- Moderator: **Ms. Claudia Chwalisz**, Policy Analyst, OECD Open Government Unit; Author, *The People's Verdict* and *The Populist Signal*

The panel will be kept small to allow ample time for questions from the floor. A wide range of representatives from Member States, parliamentarians, academia, civil society, and youth, will be invited.

Outcome

The outcome of the discussion will be a summary paper to be distributed widely so as to encourage thought and discussion among a range of stakeholders, including Governments; UN Resident Coordinators; UN Country Teams; UN entities; parliamentarians; civil society; youth; academia.