

House Democracy Partnership
Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky Statement
December 1, 2021

Good morning, distinguished members of the House Democracy Partnership. Chairman Price and Co-Chairman Buchanan, thank you for inviting me here to discuss the vital role of independent and constitutionally driven legislatures and the importance of strengthening legislative efforts.

Chairman Price, as a founding member of the House Democracy Partnership and given the news that you will be stepping down next year after more than thirty-years in Congress, thank you for your service.

Members of the House Democracy Partnership, we are living in an era of Great-Power Competition. Russia and China are challenging U.S. leadership and influence around the world. In its 2021 Annual Report to Congress, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission concluded that "China's leaders have made plain their ambition to present the CCP's one-party rule to the world as a superior political, economic, and moral model to democracy and capitalism."

This year also marked the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, according to Freedom House's annual report, "Nearly 75 percent of the world's population lived in a country that faced deterioration last year." New data from the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index showed, for the fourth year in a row, the rule of law in a majority of 139 countries declined.

This democratic recession has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Authoritarian governments have used the pandemic to seize more power. As U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in the 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, "The pandemic impacted not only individuals' health, but their abilities to safely enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Our moral narrative matters. Legislative bodies should continue to work together in innovative ways to foster interaction and uphold our cherished values. As President of the International Republican Institute, Daniel Twining, well said in a recent op-ed, "Western retreat only emboldens autocrats in ways that amplify dangers to American national security." Tackling these challenges requires your commitment, dedication, and hard work. I commend the House Democracy Partnership for its concrete work and achievements.

Next week, the White House is hosting the inaugural Democracy Summit. The summit will focus on challenges and opportunities facing democracies and will provide a platform for leaders to make both individual and collective commitments to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad. The final day of the Summit, December 10th, marks Human Rights Day. And I understand that this Commission will lead the Legislative Track of the Summit, specifically designed for members of the legislature.

Additionally, in six months, a civil society stocktaking of the commitments made at the governmental summit will occur at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit in June that will bring together civil society organizations, tech, and business partners as well as governments including the State Department. This will afford the Partnership yet another chance for engagement.

How specifically have legislatures and parliamentary exchanges and initiatives advanced the democratic agenda?

- The Partnership is a valuable forum for bolstering democratic unity through facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges, trainings, and targeted technical assistance.
- For example, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the House Democracy Partnership organized virtual workshops connecting U.S. Members of Congress and senior staff with Members of Parliament abroad. This innovative solution during those uncertain times filled that critical gap for interaction to share experiences, obstacles, and best practices.
- As we know, there is nothing better than person to person contact; but because of distance and schedules - the virtual scenario can and should be continued to be deployed, when necessary.
- Contact with other parliaments is also valuable for sharing useful information and legislative processes. Exchanges provide legislators and their staffs with a window on the U.S. legislative system and access to technical expertise from around the world on shared challenges. These opportunities can foster consensus with the legislative bodies of foreign governments.
- Rule of law is foundational for a free society. Transformative legislation advances change. It can further good governance, and foster institutional reforms in countries, providing a solid democratic foundation. Legislation that provides reforms, transparency, oversight, and responsibility and eradicates corruption, is impactful. Accountability and oversight are a type of check on power, and most significantly on the budget.
- Members of Congress and Parliament have also gone on both NDI and IRI election monitoring missions together. Most recently, IRI's election observer assessments in Georgia and Ethiopia which have been monitoring reforms in both countries, have helped restore some level of public trust and foster positive efforts for further democratic reform.

In closing, legislatures are integral to advancing and strengthening democratic governance. As my Hearing colleague and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright recently wrote in Foreign Affairs, "Democracy's assets are superior, however, because they demand the best from everyone and are grounded in respect for human rights, individual freedom, and social responsibility."