

**Remarks at the Global Philanthropy Forum  
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**“Partnerships to Advance Democratic Decision-making”  
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***INTRODUCTION***

After a year’s hiatus, I’m delighted to be back at the GPF. I want to congratulate and thank the World Affairs Council of Northern California and the Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. I have learned a lot over the past two days.

***THE PARADOX***

As we consider how to create and sustain partnerships to advance democratic decision-making we need to start with an assessment of the health of democracy itself. In these brief remarks, I will only summarize: what we find is an alarming paradox: while more of the world’s people now live under democratic regimes than at any other time in human history, democracy is in some peril.

The annual Freedom House survey of Freedom in the World, reports that nearly 60% of the world’s population now live in electoral democracies, compared with only 31% in the 1950s. The Global Civil Society Yearbook published by the London School of Economics documents the explosive growth of civil society both within countries and at the global level. There are encouraging early signs of democratic stirrings in China and elsewhere in the “non-democratic world.”

But despite these positive trends, only 44% of the world's people live in societies that are truly free, where people enjoy a broad range of political rights and civil liberties. Civic engagement, especially electoral engagement (voting) is declining here in the U.S. and elsewhere. Public trust in the institutions of democratic governance is low.

Why is democracy so fragile? I think in large measure it's because more and more people don't see democracy delivering on its promises. Profound economic inequality persists here at home and elsewhere across the globe. Human rights, decent housing, adequate nutrition, basic health care, clean water, and basic education remain out of reach for millions of citizens in democratic states, again, including our own.

Democracy is in peril because the power of the public interest has been eclipsed by the power of special and entrenched interests. Abject corruption and the corrupting influence of money in politics are also undermining democracy across the globe.

Democracy is fragile because economic globalization has far outpaced political globalization. We have not yet devised and empowered truly democratic institutions of global governance.

Today, 51 of the 100 largest economies in the world are corporations, not nation-states. [Institute for Policy Studies] And as globalization progresses, the decisions of multilateral organizations, multinational corporations, and global civil society groups have increasing significance in our daily lives. Yet these decisions are often made with inadequate inclusiveness, accountability, or transparency.

## ***LESSONS FROM CEE & FORMER SOVIET UNION***

As we consider how to reinvigorate democracy for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I think we can learn some valuable lessons from the post-communist experience of Eastern Europe and the FSU. Perhaps the most important one is this: democracy is far more than free elections and representative government. Democracy is more than a process or set of institutions.

Democracy is a way of thinking and behaving in society. A way of resolving conflict and solving problems. Democracy is fundamentally a culture, a “civic faith,” to use John Dewey’s term. And as such it is not really an export commodity. It must be largely home-grown. It can’t be stimulated by simplistic “supply-side” strategies. It relies far more on “demand-side” solutions. So how can we stimulate democratic demand and help make democracy effective for the global challenges we face? And what can philanthropy do?

## ***WHAT CAN PHILANTHROPY DO?***

There are numerous ways philanthropy can strengthen democracy – I will highlight just a few, largely from our experience at the RBF.

First, I think the challenge is of such enormous importance that it needs to be explicitly or at least implicitly on the philanthropic agenda. At the RBF, our new Democratic Practice program is one of just four substantive priorities. But even if democracy is not an explicit focus for grantmaking, I would suggest that it should be an

implicit philanthropic interest. While making grants to advance environmental goals, foundations can also support efforts that promote civic engagement in furtherance of those goals. We can promote greater transparency and accountability in the nonprofit sector – and in philanthropy, for that matter. We can help empower the world’s women and educate their daughters. And we can partner with marginalized communities. There are lots of ways we can strengthen democracy while pursuing other interests.

Second, we need to support democracy R&D – experimentation in new forms of democratic decision-making like the one (deliberative polling ) Jim Fishkin will describe in a few moments. We need to test the efficacy of e-democracy – the use of new technologies and the internet to advance democratic participation and decision-making.

Third, we need to devote special attention to encouraging youth civic engagement. Today’s youth aren’t apathetic. On the contrary, they’re deeply distressed. They want to contribute to society but find direct service far more attractive and effective than political action. We need to support youth-driven strategies that help make the links from service to civic engagement.

Fourth, we need to help civil society institutions – NGOs – to move toward a stronger and more explicit engagement with public policy related to constructive social change. We need to help build advocacy capacity and support efforts to translate the lessons learned in our communities into changes in policy.

Fifth, we must work to strengthen the capacity of government institutions to deliver public goods effectively and fairly. We should support innovations in public administration, new partnerships between the public, private and non-profit sectors, and efforts to restore respect for and belief in government after 30 years of political assaults on its very legitimacy.

Sixth, we must work to make globalization more democratic. This can only be accomplished by reforming the existing institutions of global governance to make them more inclusive, more transparent and more accountable. We should also support critical thinking about the possible need for new institutional frameworks to provide for the democratic management of global challenges. The leaders of 1945 thought boldly about the need for new multinational institutions to manage the challenges of the post-war world. Philanthropy must support bold leadership that is ready to address the institutional needs of the post-modern world.

## ***CONCLUSION***

These are just a few ideas to stimulate our discussion – and I very much look forward to your questions and comments. But I'd like to close with one additional point. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have profoundly changed our position in the world. The United States is now engaged in a War on Terrorism that seems to relegate all other issues to a position of secondary importance. And yet to view this as a war on terror is to miss the point.

We *are* at war. But it is really a war against a totalitarian ideology espoused by a radical few who employ terror as their weapon of choice. This is not a territorial war. It is a war for the hearts and minds of millions of people living in repressive, unjust, impoverished, and backward societies. And we seem to be losing. A recent poll conducted by the Pew center found that 50% or more of Indonesians, Jordanians, Pakistanis, and Palestinians have confidence that Osama bin Laden will “do the right thing regarding world affairs.”

The war certainly has its military dimensions. But victory will depend more on the power of ideas than the power of armies. We must work to make democracy the prevailing idea.

But as I said earlier, democracy is not really an export commodity. Outsiders can help indigenous democrats to adopt democratic processes and to construct democratic institutions but ultimately the development of a democratic culture depends on the belief of a citizenry in the rule of law, in equality of rights, in participatory decision-making, and in the transcending value of freedom.

If we wish to see democracy triumphant in the war of ideas, perhaps the most important thing we can do is to restore the health of our own democracy. This means reinvigorating our own domestic democratic culture, finding new ways to re-engage disaffected citizens, making government effective, and behaving in the world as a democratic superpower, not just a military superpower. The way to win the war for

democracy is by example. The US must once again be a beacon of democracy, not just a bastion of military might.