

QUESTION AND ANSWER: THE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES INVITATIONS PROCESS

What is the Community of Democracies?

The Community of Democracies (CD) is an association of democratic states committed to supporting and strengthening democracy worldwide. The CD is the only global forum for democratic and democratizing states to coordinate common approaches to democratic development. It holds periodic Ministerial Meetings and other high-level conferences where Foreign Affairs Ministers, senior officials and civil society gather to discuss ways in which democracy can be enhanced and supported. Three Ministerial Meetings have been held to date (Warsaw 2000, Seoul 2002, and Santiago 2005), and a fourth one will take place in Bamako, Mali on November 14-17, 2007. The Convening Group, a committee of 16 countries¹ from every region of the world, is responsible for setting its agenda, issuing invitations and assisting in the planning of Ministerial Meetings.

What is the International Advisory Committee?

The International Advisory Committee (IAC) is an independent high-level body of experts from around the world established for the purpose of assessing the quality of democracy in countries belonging or aspiring to belong to the Community of Democracies (CD). It aims to strengthen the Community of Democracies by improving its invitation process. The IAC makes recommendations to the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies on which countries should be invited to the next Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies in Bamako (Mali), in November 2007. The IAC also makes suggestions for steps governments should take to meet the CD's criteria for participation.

How are governments chosen to participate in the Community of Democracies?

Governments invited to the biennial CD meeting must demonstrate genuine commitment to basic norms of human rights and democratic practices that the CD governments themselves have committed to defend and promote. Starting with the founding Warsaw Declaration statement of democratic standards, the CD governments have defined "essential elements of representative democracy" which serve as the basic qualification for participation. The Convening Group formally adopted Criteria for Participation in September 2002, which were endorsed by the participating governments in Seoul and Santiago. The Criteria for Participation include such factors as:

- Free, fair, periodic, and competitive elections by universal suffrage.
- Separation of powers.
- Adherence to the rule of law.
- Equality before the law.
- Military accountability to a democratically elected civilian government.
- Respect for freedom of conscience, religion, speech, and expression.
- Freedom from arbitrary arrest.
- Right to a fair trial.
- Protection of gender equality.
- Protection of minority rights.

The Criteria for Participation include an additional category of "observer states" for those countries that fail to meet all criteria but are in a transition process and have made positive progress. Several

¹ In late 2005, the Convening Group was expanded to its current 16 members: Cape Verde, Chile, Czech Republic, El Salvador, India, Italy, Mali (Chair), Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, South Africa and the United States of America.

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months prior to each biennial meeting, the Convening Group evaluates *de novo* which governments meet the Criteria for Participation.

What's special about how countries get invited to the CD?

The value of the approach taken by the CD is three-fold: first, it holds all states to the same universal standards of democracy and human rights; second, by requiring a periodic *de novo* review of a state's democratic performance rather than granting automatic membership, it acknowledges that democracy is not an end-state but a process in which states may advance on or fall away from the path of democracy; and third, it offers the incentive of membership to governments pursuing genuine progress on democratic reforms.

What problems have emerged in applying these standards to the invitations process?

In practice, while most participating states meet the criteria, other factors, such as security, economic and regional considerations, have interfered with a rigorous application of CD participation standards. For instance, over a dozen countries which Freedom House and the Democracy Coalition Project had recommended only as observers or non-invitees for the Santiago Ministerial were nonetheless upgraded to observer or full participant status.² There was a feeling among many that political, security and economic considerations had overridden the application of the CD's own standards, though a lack of transparency of the invitations process has made analysis difficult.

What is the role of the IAC in the invitations process?

The International Advisory Committee aims to respond to the question "who gets invited to CD Ministerials?" by bringing greater legitimacy and transparency to the invitations process. IAC Members, high-level figures with years of experience in democratic politics and human rights and independent of governments, examined each country using only the standards set out by the CD for participation. Its work was supported by extensive research and analysis conducted by the IAC Secretariat.

What support does the IAC have from the Convening Group?

The IAC is designed to be an independent, non-governmental expert advisory body to the Convening Group. The IAC and its Secretariat have maintained a constant dialogue with the Convening Group. The Convening Group has officially welcomed the work of the IAC and agreed to use it as a valuable resource for making decisions on which countries to invite to the Bamako Ministerial.

Who is on the IAC?

The IAC is composed of an international blue-ribbon panel of experts from politics, diplomacy, academia, media and civil society, all of whom are independent figures known for their commitment to democracy and human rights promotion around the world.

- Genaro Arriagada, Former Minister of the Presidency of Chile

² Those countries invited to Santiago were: Afghanistan (participant), Armenia (observer), Azerbaijan (observer), Bahrain (participant), Fiji (participant), Jordan (participant), Kuwait (observer), Malaysia (participant), Moldova (participant), Morocco (participant), Oman (observer), Russia (participant), Singapore (observer), Tunisia (observer), and Venezuela (participant).

For further analysis, see http://www.demcoalition.org/pdf/Country_Assessments_CoD_Invitation_Process.pdf

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- César Gaviria, Former President of Colombia
- E. Gyimah-Boadi, Executive Director, Center for Democratic Development, Ghana
- Morton Halperin, Director of U.S. Advocacy, Open Society Institute, USA.
- Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan
- Asma Jahangir, Chairperson, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
- Josef Janning, Head of International Relations, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Germany
- Hong-Koo Lee, Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea
- António Mascarenhas Monteiro, Former President of Cape Verde
- Nadezhda Mihailova, Member of Parliament, Bulgaria
- Mark Palmer, Former Ambassador, Vice-Chairman of Freedom House, USA
- Sonia Picado, Chairperson, Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, Costa Rica
- Ghassan Salamé, Former Minister of Culture of Lebanon
- Wim Kok, Former Prime Minister of The Netherlands (Advisory Member)
- Martin Palouš, UN Permanent Representative, Czech Republic (Observer)

How does the IAC operate?

To carry out its work, the IAC relies on a professional team of researchers and analysts in the IAC Secretariat which produced country reports based on a wide range of available reporting and democracy indexes, as well as local sources. The IAC Secretariat prepared independent assessments of 46 countries considered for participation in Bamako, analyzing their record of respect for democracy and human rights in accordance with the official Criteria for Participation in the Community of Democracies. Each report contains suggestions on steps non-qualifying states should take to meet the participation criteria as well as ways the Convening Group could encourage greater respect for CD standards. The IAC members deliberated over ten months, in person and through telephone and online exchanges.

Which organizations are the members of the IAC Secretariat?

- Bertelsmann Stiftung – Germany
- Center for Democratic Development – Ghana
- Democracy Coalition Project - United States (Coordinator)
- Freedom House - United States

How did work proceed?

First phase (Spring 2006): Country Selection

The IAC Secretariat used quantitative indicators to identify:

- Those countries which should be invited.
- Those countries which should not be invited.
- Those “borderline” countries that deserve further study.

The IAC Secretariat analyzed countries using various respected quantitative governance indicators.³ Two benchmarks were established using two of these indicators, one to select countries that were initially recommended for invitation, and one for countries who were initially recommended for non-

³ The World Bank Institute Governance Indicators, the Freedom House “Freedom in the World” ratings, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) and the Transparency International indicators.

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participation.⁴ Those countries that were neither recommended for invitation, nor for exclusion, were considered “borderline” countries that deserved further, in-depth, qualitative study. Using this method, 35 countries were selected for further study. The Secretariat also identified 11 so-called “watch-list” countries out of those recommended for invitation using the quantitative analysis, but where special conditions warranted close monitoring or raised concerns about a slide back towards a non-democratic practices.

Second phase (Summer 2006): In-Depth Country Studies

- During Phase 2, the IAC Secretariat carried out intensive qualitative research on those countries identified to need further study. Studies were designed to identify the particular CD participation criteria where a country experienced problems or deficiencies, assess its recent democratic evolution and make specific recommendations to the country so as to improve compliance. The IAC Secretariat used in-country sources as much as possible. Phase 2 of the project complemented the quantitative analysis of Phase 1 with qualitative materials like specific country reports and primary sources on the state of democracy and human rights in the country.

Third Phase (Autumn and Winter 2006-2007)

The IAC convened in early November 2006, in Berlin, Germany, to consider the Secretariat’s reports, and to make its own recommendations to the Convening Group of the CD. The IAC reached agreement on its final statement in January 2006.

Fourth and Final Phase (Winter and Spring 2007)

In February and March 2007, the IAC presented its recommendations, as well as the IAC Secretariat Reports, to the CD Convening Group.

In March and April 2007, in presentations in Bamako, Brussels and Washington, the IAC’s recommendations and reports are being presented to the general public and the media. They are available online at www.demcoalition.org

What if a country improves or declines dramatically in the run-up to the CD Ministerial?

The IAC and its Secretariat continue to monitor situations that may call for a serious reassessment of a country’s eligibility for participation in the CD, as recommended by the IAC.

How can you judge whether a country is a democracy or not?

Evaluating whether a country is a democracy is not a black-and-white decision and can change in either direction over time. The goal is to capture trends as evidenced by a government’s actions in the area of democratic practices and respect for human rights. While quantitative indicators can be blunt tools of assessment, they capture broad trends well, and are a good starting point to assess which countries are committed to democratic practices and human rights and those that are not. To complement the quantitative research, the IAC used in-depth, qualitative analyses to assess those countries in the “grey area,” where quantitative indicators are relatively less useful.

⁴ The Freedom House “Freedom in the World” rating and the BTI.

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How can you apply Western definitions of democracy to judge non-Western countries?

The standards for participation in the Community of Democracies were endorsed by over 120 countries representing every major region, culture, religion and ethnic tradition. They are based on universal standards adopted by the United Nations and elaborated upon in the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies. While some of the political theory of democracy may be rooted in Western thought and history, in the last six decades we have witnessed the rise of non-Western democracies, often driven forward by popular movements, weakening the argument that democracy is a “Western” notion with no appeal or applicability elsewhere. There is a growing international consensus that the basic elements of democratic governance and human rights are the crucial building blocks of development, prosperity, and stability.

How is the Community of Democracies governed?

The Community of Democracies meets in plenary session at least once annually to receive reports, review its work agenda, and issue declarations. It is managed by the *Convening Group (CG)*, which is responsible for setting its agenda, issuing invitations and assisting in the planning of Ministerial Meetings. CD decisions are generally made by consensus. Chairmanship of the CG rotates on a biennial basis, and the CG chairing government is responsible for hosting the biennial ministerial conference, as well as carrying out other CD initiatives. Currently, the chair is Mali, which will host the next Ministerial Meeting in November 2007 in its capital, Bamako. After the Bamako ministerial, the chairmanship will move on to Portugal. In addition to the Convening Group, four working groups have been created to address such issues as poverty and democracy, threats to democratic governance, regional cooperation and civil society. While it does not have a permanent secretariat, a proposal is under consideration to create one next year.

What role does the Community of Democracies play at the United Nations?

The Community of Democracies has established a Democracy Caucus at the UN for the purpose of sharing information and coordinating common positions on matters relating to democracy and human rights. It has, for example, issued statements regarding creation of the UN Human Rights Council and elections of new members and supported the UN Democracy Fund.

What is the role of NGOs in the Community of Democracies?

Running parallel to the governmental process is an independent *civil society process* aimed at engaging nongovernmental actors in CD activities. At the Santiago Ministerial meeting, over 60 civil society leaders from around the world participated in the discussions with foreign ministers and senior officials. The nongovernmental process of the CD is managed through two main bodies:

- *The International Steering Committee (ISC)*: The ISC serves as the main focal point for nongovernmental interaction and advocacy with the Community of Democracies and its Convening Group. It includes civil society representatives from each of five world regions as well as a representative of the nongovernmental secretariat in Bamako.
- *The Nongovernmental Secretariat*: Established prior to the 2005 Ministerial Conference in Santiago, an NGO Secretariat in the country hosting the Ministerial Meeting coordinates the input of civil society groups in the Ministerial meetings. The Secretariat is held by an NGO from the country chairing the Convening Group.

Two members of the ISC also serve as members of the IAC, while others were consulted as country experts and reviewers.