

“While there is overwhelming public support for democracy in India, and voter turnout is higher than in most Western democracies—over 58 percent of the electorate voted in the 2009 national elections—Indian citizens have dangerously low levels of trust in their political parties and politicians. This popular disaffection stems from a number of causes. Nearly a quarter of the members of the Indian Lok Sabha (Lower House) have criminal charges against them. More than half of all members of parliament are multi-millionaires, while



India’s per-capita income is less than \$1,000 a year. The process of candidate selection by political parties is undemocratic and perpetuates dynastic politics. Campaign-finance laws are routinely flouted and are ineffective in checking the flow of illegal funds to election campaigns. Finally, the poor quality of India’s elected representatives has undermined the functioning of parliament. The Supreme Court, the Election Commission, and civil society organizations have all suggested initiatives to inject transparency into the electoral system and improve the quality of elected

representatives. But if India is to be served by better politicians, there must be reform of campaign finance laws, more democracy within political parties, and greater civil society engagement with politics beyond the act of voting. ”

—Dr. Ronojoy Sen, June 30, 2009