

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT TWENTY-FIVE years have passed since I first voted in support of a bill that authorized congressional funding for a new private, bipartisan foundation established to “encourage free and democratic institutions throughout the world.” That foundation, of course, is the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which I have been honored serve as Chairman for the past eight years. This message is my last as NED Chairman, and continuing in the Endowment’s fine bipartisan tradition, I am pleased to pass the gavel on to my friend and colleague Richard Gephardt, who was elected NED Chairman in January 2009. NED and the grantees we support could not have a more capable or committed leader.

In its first year of operation, when NED had little more than \$18 million to spend, it would have taken a true visionary to imagine that its small grants program would grow strong enough not only to support key democratic movements in every region of the world but also to provide the foundation for one of the most exciting and dynamic networks of activists working for democratic change in the world today.

Ten years ago, in collaboration with two Indian organizations, NED convened a group of several hundred democrats from around the world, who shared a common belief “that the time has come for democrats throughout the world to develop new forms of cooperation to promote the development of democracy.”

What started in a New Delhi hotel a decade ago has blossomed into a worldwide movement of democrats—the World Movement for Democracy—linked through common values, shared objectives, and new information technology. It is a movement based on cross-

border networks of activists sharing information and ideas, and collaborating on practical projects.

The Endowment, which staffs this global “network of networks,” has been proud to play a role in its development. But the World Movement for Democracy is truly a grassroots phenomenon, led by a Steering Committee of activists, scholars, and practitioners from some 30 countries. Much of the energy of the World Movement has been provided by leaders of a highly diverse group of non-governmental organizations, many of whose democracy building activities are described in this annual report.



At its biennial assemblies, the World Movement brings together NGO representatives, journalists, trade unionists, politicians, scholars, business leaders, funders, and others to engage in practical skills sharing workshops. Inspiration is provided by a broad range of keynote speakers, many chosen from the ranks of the activists themselves, and through the presentation of “Democracy Courage Tributes” to those toiling for the cause of democracy in particularly inhospitable or even threatening environments, often outside the global media spotlight.

But it is what happens between assemblies that gives the World Movement its vitality. Regional networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America provide forums for serious engagement on matters of common interest and concern. Functional networks of women, youth, democracy think-tanks, local government officials and others offer opportunities to share ideas through online discussion groups and periodic conferences. The World Movement is now poised to take advantage of new social networking technology to facilitate even closer collaboration among participants.

A movement that strengthens democratic cooperation and solidarity could not be more timely. Indeed, democrats from Belarus to Zimbabwe, from Burma to Uzbekistan, continue to face serious threats not only to their aspirations but, in all too many cases, to their very existence at the hands of autocrats who are increasingly using sophisticated methods, often in concert with one another, to suppress political activity. This suppression frequently includes laws and regulations that severely limit the activities of NGOs and restrict their ability to receive international support.

In response, the World Movement has launched its Defending Civil Society project. In partnership with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, the World Movement issued a report last year, translated into six languages, that highlights the ways in which governments are restricting the nongovernmental sector, particularly the work of democracy and human rights NGOs, and articulates the longstanding, widely-accepted principles for protecting the freedom of such organizations to associate, conduct activities, and receive assistance both domestically and from abroad.

The report has already been introduced at a number of regional forums, and a generous grant received at the end of the year from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade will enable the World Movement to further its implementation. More recently, the Steering Committee approved a new project to assess democracy assistance funding strategies that will have major input from those on the ground who are the key shapers and implementers of democracy programs.

Through periodic issuing of alerts on behalf of democrats at risk, the World Movement has also played a role as a

principled voice on behalf of democrats around the world. And governments and regional bodies are beginning to seek its counsel. A good example was the meeting of the Steering Committee held in Prague at the end of 2008 that offered Czech officials an opportunity to solicit ideas for advancing democracy as they prepared to assume the Presidency of the European Union for the first half of 2009.

In a message to the new U.S. President wishing him well and taking note of his administration's potential to galvanize the support of democrats around the world, the Steering Committee wrote,

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“We strongly believe that sustainable development and security cannot be achieved without building the institutions of democracy and good governance. And we look to you, with your moral authority, your exceptional ability to communicate, and your past achievements in organizing civil society and defending constitutional rights, to place a priority on these issues.”

The report that follows highlights much of the day-to-day work of many of those same democrats working in every corner of the globe. We are deeply grateful to both the outgoing administration and the U.S. Congress for making it possible for the Endowment to support the vast array of initiatives described here. We hope that these democrats will take advantage of the opportunities created by the burgeoning networks of the World Movement for Democracy, and that these interactions will help fulfill the vision of its founders who saw it as a way to “help people throughout the world who aspire to democracy as a way of life for themselves and future generations.”



Vin Weber
Chairman