

Remarks by Minister of State for External Affairs at the Eighth Ministerial Conference of Community of Democracies, San Salvador, Republic of El Salvador

July 28, 2015

Honourable Hugo Martinez, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of El Salvador;

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen;

1. It is a great privilege for me to be here today at the VIII Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies in the beautiful city of San Salvador. I would like to thank our host, the Government of El Salvador, for the excellent arrangements and also for their warm hospitality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. As one of the founding members, India takes pride in its association with the Community of Democracies. It is, but, natural for India, as the world's largest democracy with well-established democratic institutions and practices, to be closely associated with a forum like the Community of Democracies that recognises and seeks to promote democratic governance globally. We deeply appreciate the value of democratic governance that emphasizes the role of individuals and the community- all of them, without any exclusion- in shaping the development parameters of their respective societies.
3. The theme for this Ministerial Conference is 'Democracy and Development.' We feel that democracy is a vital tool for overall development of a nation which equally benefits each and every citizen. By spreading and ensuring democratic values, governments can ensure that development in all fields such as economic, political, social, human, educational, etc. can touch the lives of the weakest strata of the society. In some ways, good government, good governance, and economic growth are intertwined; they are a package deal. The interlinking of democratization and development helps both of them to take root durably.
4. We appreciate the efforts of the Community of Democracies to promote empowerment, energization, and engagement globally. In the end, it is the people in nation states who must bring about the changes that they want. It is the peoples in nation states who must promote democratic values and if they can be empowered to do this, if they can understand that they have the power to do this, and if they can be energized to carry out their work, then we will not be far from the kind of community that joins all the peoples and countries of the world.
5. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that the newly emerging dispensations in these countries are able to genuinely adapt to democracy beyond the initial idea of exercising one's franchise. Embracing democratic institutions and values will not only help to protect the fundamental rights of citizens, but also provide a bulwark to counter rise of extremism and

radicalism in society. Such sustainability requires establishment of democratic processes and institutions that can translate the aspiration for democracy into a truly democratic governance system. In this regard, something really significant and relevant, the father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said and I quote 'The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within'. We, as the Community of Democracies, should work out an agenda for supporting democracy in the countries that have gone through turbulence and are still undergoing transitions, by showing the way, and helping them to rebuild public confidence and restore peace and rule of law.

6. A vibrant civil society is an important pillar that undergirds both democratic governance and broad-based prosperity. A democratic state cannot be stable unless it is effective and legitimate, with the respect and support of its citizens. Civil society is a check, a monitor, but also a vital partner in the quest for this kind of positive relationship between the democratic state and its citizens. We believe in the importance of States' commitment to create an enabling environment for the civil society to function independently, however, the civil society has an equally and matching obligation to play their role with utmost care and responsibility. Recently in India, civil society contributed significantly in passage of a strong Lokpal or Ombudsman Bill, to promote democratic checks on corruption. The bureaucracy, judiciary and political leadership are now in the purview of a strong law to check corruption. This reflects a very strong commitment to democracy. Let us have high hopes and expectations of the role being played by the civil society in democracies of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. We greatly appreciate the active role charted by El Salvador in its Presidency of the Community of Democracies and in taking forward the organisation's agenda through promoting and strengthening democratic governance values. The next Presidency of the Community of Democracies will be equally challenging especially in light of 2015 being a landmark year as we celebrate the 70 years of the establishment of the United Nations and will witness the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda by our leaders in coming months. Further, the emerging global challenges to our democratic values and ethos warrant urgent redressal and reform of our international governance architecture, including the United Nations and its Security Council, so as to make it more representative and reflective of the prevailing geo-political realities.
8. We feel that the Community of Democracies should promote the global cause of democracy, not outdated geopolitical interests. Its initiatives should complement and reinforce the work currently being done by the other international bodies in this area. India has been a strong supporter of the United Nations Democracy Fund launched in July 2005 to assist projects involving civil society organizations to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions. India has contributed nearly US\$ 32 million to the UN Democracy Fund, the second largest by any country. Further, in pursuance of upholding and safeguarding democracy and rule of law principles, India has been the largest contributor to the UN Peacekeeping missions. I would like to stress that we are

prepared to do much more, both as active participants to the United Nations system and in the Community of Democracies.

9. In the end, I would like to share with you India's experience of democracy. One year ago, in the largest elections on the planet so far, 700 million people of India voted through electronic voting machines a new Government to power, with an unambiguous mandate for change, growth and jobs. The Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been working for strengthening of democratic governance aimed at economic and social development with active collaboration of civil society. It is the endeavour of our government to strengthen grass roots democracy and focus on deliverance of public services through a wide spectrum of developmental schemes and projects.

Thank you.