

Statement by
His Excellency Ban Ki-moon
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Republic of Korea

at the Opening Plenary Session of
the Third Ministerial Conference of
the Community of Democracies

28 April 2005
Santiago, Chile

Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Representatives from NGOs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to speak to you as Foreign Minister of the host country of the last Ministerial Conference held in Seoul in 2002. I wish to begin by sincerely thanking the Chilean Government for its warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for this important occasion.

It is particularly meaningful that this conference is held here in Chile, a country that stands out as a strong vindication for the cause of the Community of Democracies. Chile's journey towards democracy is a vivid manifestation of the time-tested proposition: that the will and power of the people ultimately prevails. I am glad of this opportunity to pay tribute to the Chilean people for the courage and wisdom they have shown in the process towards democracy.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

In the Warsaw Declaration and the Seoul Plan of Action, democracies of the world reaffirmed the principles of democracy as universal norms as well as their commitment to the protection, consolidation and promotion of democracy at all levels. This indeed marked a milestone. Yet declarations and plans must be followed by concrete actions. Therefore, this conference, where we are to discuss specific commitments as a strategy for future action, is truly important for the process of the Community of Democracies.

Democracy is now an unstoppable trend in any place in the world. It is rooted as a universal norm permeating every aspect of life. It provides order by managing differences in opinions and thus to ensure harmony and stability in human society. In the post-Cold War era in particular, democracy is pursued by all peoples as the ideal political and social system.

Yet, there is no short cut, no royal road to stable and working democracy. Efforts to build democracy worldwide face a number of challenges. Conflict, terrorism, poverty, and sudden disruption of constitutional order pose obstacles to many countries on the path to mature democracy. Sometimes even the meaning of democracies varies in different countries, regions and cultures. Working democracy depends not only on democratic institutions but also on individual mind-set and culture of valuing dialogue and compromise. Nurturing these takes time, experience and education.

Therefore the need for more systemic and coordinated cooperation within the international community to guide these efforts is ever more compelling. I believe that in such common efforts, our process of the Community of Democracies has a unique role to play, and our gathering here will be another landmark as we rise to this challenge with a specific strategy.

The Community of Democracies, since its inception in 2000, has engaged in various activities to promote democratic principles in the world. In the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Commission, the CD Caucus has taken several initiatives. These initiatives, among other things, aimed at strengthening principles of democracy in the work of those organizations, including cooperation with regard to the resolutions articulating and supporting democratic values. The experts group from the CD Convening Group visited Timor L'Este and Georgia to assist in efforts to establish democratic institutions. Such steps have already testified to the unequivocal niche of the Community of Democracies in the international community.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are going to start contemplating commitments to serve as guiding strategies for the future, I wish to point out several elements that should be duly reflected in our commitments.

First, human dignity and human rights must be the pervasive guiding principles. At the very heart of democracy, after all, lies the aspiration to uphold the dignity and freedom of all. The task of guarding the fundamental pillars of democracy such as the division of power, free and fair elections, the rule of law, and freedom of the press, should transcend any national differences. In particular, we should take special care to safeguard the rights of vulnerable groups such as minorities and the economically and socially marginalized.

Fostering a thriving civil society is increasingly vital. As a voice for the will of the people and a resource for policy options, civil society is playing an increasingly essential role in building and maintaining a working democracy. Creating a constructive partnership with civil society and encouraging the participation of citizens has therefore emerged as a key task for all democratic governments. I believe that the cooperative relations between governments and civil society including NGO communities need to be further strengthened.

Good governance is a *sine qua non* for the realization of human rights. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the results of the Seminar on Good Governance Practices for the Promotion of Human Rights held in Seoul in September 2004. We welcome its conclusions emphasizing the mutually reinforcing relationship between good governance and protection of human rights. Needless to say, elements of good governance such as the rule of law, accountability, transparency, and participation are best secured in a democratic environment. The Community of Democracies should lead the international society by showing best practices of good governance and protection of freedom and human rights.

The Community of Democracies certainly represents a new and unique approach. Yet there are still many countries outside the CD that are struggling in their efforts to pursue the cause of democracy.

Developing cooperative relations with them will be important. In this regard, we welcome the proposal by the UN Secretary-General in his report on the reform of the UN on strengthening the organization's capacity to help emerging democracies. We particularly support the creation of UN Democracy Fund which aims to provide help to countries seeking to establish or strengthen their democracy.

Lastly, in our discussions on measures for cooperation, the regional and country-specific context needs to be duly considered. Future action should be conceived based on a clear understanding and analysis of country and region-specific needs and challenges. The structure of this meeting, divided into two segments focusing on thematic and regional issues respectively, does indeed offer a practical and balanced approach to the issue of cooperation.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In many corners of the world, we continue to hear the unstoppable calls of our fellow humans for freedom and dignity. At the voting stations in Iraq and Afghanistan, on the streets of Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, we have witnessed the power of freedom and the resilience of human spirit. As we all know, turning such aspiration for stable democracy into reality is a daunting challenge. Yet it is one that will be worth the effort. Because the unremitting motivation behind this Community, I believe, lies in nothing less than the pure belief in human freedom and dignity that we constantly aspire to. For the Republic of Korea, it is also a way to pay back what we received from the international community during our long and arduous struggle for democracy.

Now in the Middle East, Korean troops are helping the Iraqi people to rehabilitate their war-torn country. This effort stems from our firm commitment to the values of democracy and freedom now enjoyed by the Iraqi people. It is our firm belief that Iraq will be rebuilt as a proud and prosperous democracy, vindicating our cause. I assure you that

Korea, as an active member of this Community, will continue to work closely with all of you to this end.

Indeed, the commitment we are to adopt here will be another landmark. Yet we are all aware that the greater challenge will come after this meeting, which is turning our vision into reality. Through continued commitment and action, let us make sure we make of this forum a true community.