

FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PRESS RELEASE

Climate Policy could threaten democratic freedoms, warns NGO

EMBARGOED TO 00:01 GMT, 15th September 2009

In an open letter to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon published on their new website today, the second International Day of Democracy, UK-based non-governmental organisation the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FSD) warn that unless governments step up immediate efforts to tackle climate change, the result could be significant incursions into future democratic freedoms.

As the UN and supporting organisations around the world celebrate democracy today, they know that there are some formidable environmental and natural resource challenges just around the corner—and that climate change is the biggest of them all.

FSD Director Halina Ward says:

“There is a real risk that as the decision-making implications of huge social challenges like climate change begin to bite, politicians will be tempted to tighten the reins on our democratic rights and limit our access to public decision-making on difficult issues”.

“We need politicians to take really tough steps to tackle issues like climate change, but they have to find ways of doing so with public buy-in, support and active involvement. And the longer they wait to take decisive action, the more likely it is that our democratic freedoms could suffer as the cost of preventing the worst outcomes of climate change increases”.

“We are calling on the UN to encourage its members to reflect deeply on how they can make democracy work to deliver effective actions on climate change. It’s no longer just a question of policy measures and institutions – democracy itself will have to adapt.”

Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development Chair John Elkington adds:

“Climate change is coming at our societies at an underestimated and accelerating rate—outpacing the capacity of democratic systems to respond. If democracies are to retain a commitment to inclusive decision-making, they must innovate fast.”

“The key question, as in times of war, is how to take the necessary decisions when they so often cut across the short-term interests of industries and citizens. That is where leadership—and vision—come in. And the challenge is made harder by the fact that the centre of gravity of the global economy is shifting towards Asia, where greenhouse emissions are rising fastest—and where the institutions of democracy are often weakest.”

ENDS

Note to editors:

FSD’s Director Halina Ward, and Chair John Elkington are available for media interviews and comment. The full text of the open letter to the UN Secretary-General, embargoed until 00:01 GMT on 15th September 2009, follows.

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Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (www.fdsd.org) is the new name for The Environment Foundation, a UK-based charity founded in 1983. FDSF's mission is to develop resources to equip democracy to deliver sustainable development.

Halina Ward is Director of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development. Before joining FDSF, she was Director of the Business and Sustainable Development Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. She has also worked as a Senior Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and as a solicitor practising commercial environment law.

John Elkington, a world authority on corporate responsibility and sustainable development, is Chair of the board of trustees of FDSF. John is Founding Partner and Director of Volans. Volans, launched in April 2008, aims to find, explore, advise on and build innovative scalable solutions to the great global divides that overshadow the future. John also co-founded the consultancy and think-tank SustainAbility in 1987 and was its Chair from 1995-2005. He has authored or co-authored more than 17 books, the most recent of which, *The Power of Unreasonable People: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets That Change the World*, was published by Harvard Business School Press in 2008.

The **International Day of Democracy** was declared by United Nations General Assembly in 2007. The Day is meant both to celebrate democracy and to serve as a reminder that the need to promote and protect democracy is as urgent now as ever. September 15 2009 is the second International Day of Democracy.

COP15, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and MOP5, the Fifth meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol, will take place in Copenhagen from December 7-December 18 2009.

FULL TEXT OF THE OPEN LETTER: EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 GMT, 15TH SEPTEMBER 2009

H.E Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
USA

15th September 2009

Dear Mr Secretary-General

Equipping democracy for resilience in the face of climate change

We send warm greetings on the occasion of this International Day of Democracy, a day on which it is appropriate not only to celebrate the spread of democracy, but also to pause to consider what might lie ahead; to reflect on how this 'least bad' political system might need to adapt for the future: for democracy is the only system that has thus far proven capable of fully respecting the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

There are many threats to democracy. Indeed, we are mindful of the fact that some analyses indicate that fewer than half of the world's people live in democracies. But as members of the United Nations finalise preparations for this December's COP15 UN Climate Change Conference, we

write with a specific concern: unless the world's nations take meaningful and decisive action to tackle climate change, democracy itself may be a casualty. For as the costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change rise, it will be increasingly difficult for governments to avoid taking steps that not only interfere with the personal freedoms of their citizens, but also risk alienating citizens, whether or not they vote.

We believe we must now take urgent steps to secure the resilience of our democracies in the face of the social and environmental challenge of climate change. Indeed this, Mr Secretary-General, is the task to which the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development is committed.

You may be assured of our support for the International Day of Democracy. And we ask that you consider our respectful request that in future years the Day also become an opportunity for reflection on the democratic challenge of climate change; for this is at once one of the most significant failures of democracy to date, and one of the greatest challenges that the world's democracies have ever faced together.

We are keen to support the United Nations in taking the steps needed to equip our democracies, as systems of decision-making, to tackle the climate challenge. As citizens, we must empower our elected representatives to embrace longer-term objectives, even if that sometimes impacts upon short-term self-interests. In this task, we are confident that the United Nations will play a central role in catalysing the necessary interchanges and negotiations between nations and their citizens.

Yours sincerely

John Elkington (Chair) and Halina Ward (Director)
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