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DOCUMENTS ON DEMOCRACY

G7/Canada

At the annual summit of the G7, held on June 8–9 in Charlevoix, Quebec, the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States signed the “Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats.” Subsequently, the G7 set up a Rapid Response Mechanism led by Canada to strengthen coordination among leading democracies in responding to diverse and evolving threats. The Charlevoix Commitment appears below:

We, the Leaders of the G7, share common democratic values that are central to the development of free, open, well-governed, pluralistic and prosperous societies and recognize that equality is a core component of democracy. These democratic values are essential for generating broad-based economic growth that benefits everyone, creates quality jobs and ensures opportunities for all.

Democracy and the rules-based international order are increasingly being challenged by authoritarianism and the defiance of international norms. In particular, foreign actors seek to undermine our democratic societies and institutions, our electoral processes, our sovereignty and our security. These malicious, multi-faceted and ever-evolving tactics constitute a serious strategic threat which we commit to confront together, working with other governments that share our democratic values. Defending democracy will require us to adopt a strategic approach that is consistent with universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, our international commitments to peace and security, and that promotes equality. We welcome the work of G7 Foreign and Security Ministers in Toronto to establish a common understanding of unacceptable actions by foreign actors with the malicious intent of undermining our countries’ democratic systems as the basis for our collective and individual response.

We, the leaders of the G7, commit to:

1. Respond to foreign threats, both together and individually, in order to meet the challenges facing our democracies.
2. Strengthen G7 cooperation to prevent, thwart and respond to malign interference by foreign actors aimed at undermining the democratic processes and the national interests of a G7 state.
3. Establish a G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to strengthen our coordination to identify and respond to diverse and evolving threats to our democracies, including through sharing information and analysis, and identifying opportunities for coordinated response.
4. Share lessons learned and best practices in collaboration with governments, civil society and the private sector that are developing related initiatives including those that promote free, independent and pluralistic media; fact-based information; and freedom of expression.
5. Engage directly with internet service providers and social media platforms regarding malicious misuse of information technology by foreign actors, with a particular focus on improving transparency regarding the use and seeking to prevent the illegal use of personal data and breaches of privacy.
6. Support public learning and civic awareness aimed at promoting critical thinking skills and media literacy on intentionally misleading information, and improving online security and safety.
7. In accordance with applicable laws, ensure a high level of transparency around sources of funding for political parties and all types of political advertising, especially during election campaigns.

Brazil

Following a polarizing and often violent election campaign, Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil in an October 28 runoff. (For more on the Brazilian elections, see the article by Wendy Hunter and Timothy Power on pp. 68–82 above.) Bolsonaro’s October 29 victory speech is excerpted below:

I ask you all to be witnesses to the fact that the new government will guarantee the construction of democracy and liberty. It’s a promise. It’s not the promise of a party. It’s an oath, a sacred oath. Freedom will liberate this country. Freedom will turn us into a great nation. The truth will shine and will guide us as it has guided us all along and will continue to guide us. What has happened today in the elections is not the victory of a single party, but the celebration of freedom by an entire country. . . .

Freedom is a basic principle: the freedom of movement, the freedom of walking along the streets wherever you wish to, the liberty of free enterprise, political and religious freedom, the freedom to have your opinions and to defend them, the freedom of choice and respect for that choice. . . .

There are not different Brazils; there are not four or five different categories of Brazil. There is a single nation, a democratic nation, which is based on private ownership, the right to ownership. We will defend this constitutional principle which is the basis of all democratic nations. . . .

During our trips over the last four years across Brazil, I have often been told, "Bolsonaro, you are our hope." Every time I've shaken hands, every time I've talked to people, I have heard words of that kind, words of encouragement which have strengthened my desire to give Brazil its rightful role. And in this project we will take on board all those who share our objectives. Even in the most difficult periods, even in the most difficult times, we have been able to see all these people, and we have never lost the conviction that we will succeed together and that we will be victorious together. . . .

I assert that we will provide you with a decent government which will really work for all Brazilians. We are a great country, and now together let's turn this country into a great nation. A free, democratic, and prosperous nation. Brazil above everything. God above everything. Thank you.

Mexico

In elections on July 1, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) won the presidency in a landslide victory, and his new National Regeneration Movement also won both houses of the legislature. In his inaugural address on December 1, AMLO presented his presidency as the beginning of a new era in Mexican history. Excerpts are presented below:

By mandate of the people today we initiate the fourth political transformation of Mexico. It may seem pretentious or exaggerated to say so, but today not only begins a new government, today begins a change of political regime. From now on, a transformation will be carried out that is peaceful and orderly, but at the same time profound and radical, because it will put an end to the corruption and impunity that prevent the rebirth of Mexico.

If we summarize in a few words the three great transformations of our history, we could say that our struggle for independence was fought to abolish slavery and achieve national sovereignty. The period of La Reforma was a struggle for the predominance of civil power and for the restoration of the Republic. And during the Revolution our people and their extraordinary leaders fought for justice and for democracy. Now,

we want to turn honesty and fraternity into a way of life and government.

This is not a question of rhetoric or propaganda. These postulates are based on the conviction that the Mexican crisis stemmed not only from the failure of the neoliberal economic model applied in the last 36 years, but also from of the predominance during this period of the most filthy public and private corruption. In other words, as we have repeated for many years, nothing has harmed Mexico more than the dishonesty of its rulers and of the small minority that has profited from political influence. That is the main cause of our economic and social inequality, and also of the insecurity and violence that we suffer. . . .

The government will no longer be a simple facilitator of looting, as has been the case before. The government is no longer going to be a committee in the service of a rapacious minority. It will represent the rich and the poor, believers and free thinkers, and all Mexican men and women, regardless of ideology, sexual orientation, culture, language, place of origin, educational level, or socioeconomic status. There will be an authentic rule of law, as summarized by the phrase used by our nineteenth-century liberals: Nothing outside the margins of the law, and no one above the law. We will also move toward a true democracy, and will end the shameful tradition of electoral fraud. The elections will be clean and free, and whoever uses public or private resources to buy votes and traffic in the poverty of the people or who uses the budget to favor candidates or parties, will go to jail without bail. The fight against corruption and austerity will allow us to free up enough funds, more than we imagine, much more, to boost the development of Mexico. . . .

We will put aside neoliberal hypocrisy. The state will take care of reducing social inequalities, and social justice will not continue to be displaced from the government's agenda. Those born poor will not be condemned to die poor. All human beings have the right to live and be happy. It is inhumane to use the government to defend particular interests and to avoid using it when it comes to protecting the benefit of the majority. . . . We are going to govern for all, but we are going to give preference to the vulnerable and the dispossessed. For the good of all, but first the poor. That is our watchword and, as of today, our principle of government.

Maldives

In an election on September 23, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party won a surprising victory over incumbent Abdullah Yameen to become president of the Maldives. In his inaugural address on November 17, Solih emphasized the need for justice, rule of law, and a return to constitutional principles. Exerpts are presented below:

It was with pride and high hopes that the Maldives first embarked to govern its state affairs in accordance with the new constitution founded

on democratic norms. The new constitution that came into effect guaranteed the Maldivian people a myriad of rights they had long been denied. The constitution brought with it a state system consisting of three separate powers.

Nevertheless, what we witness today is a people lamenting a hijacked constitution and with it the democratic state we had envisioned. Today we shall set sail, with a reinvigorated vision, to practice rule of law within the constitutional domain. We shall commence the new presidential term with our continued trust in the benevolence of Almighty Allah to give us the strength to guarantee the Maldivian people justice and good governance emboldened by the constitution—governance that upholds the exemplary principles of Islam, is transparent, and is accountable.

We are at a critical juncture in our history, where we are presented with a novel opportunity generations past have not witnessed. We are determined to set aside our political differences and put forth public welfare. It has become even more crucial that we unite as one to change the current course of our nation for a better future. God willing, my administration will not segregate the populace by one's ethnicity, country of birth, race, sex, physical or mental disability, political belief and worldview, island, or any other conditions. In my administration, no citizen shall be excluded. Every citizen shall have universal access to all available services.

Angola

On November 6, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the second-largest grouping in the European Parliament, hosted an event in Brussels entitled “Nelson Mandela–100th Anniversary: A Celebration of Mandela’s Legacy and a Reflection on Democracy and Good Governance in Africa.” Speakers included Angolan journalist Rafael Marques, whose remarks are excerpted below:

One of the tragedies of African politics is that more often than not the so-called “big men” who hold political power are wolves who prey on their own people: oppressing, robbing and debasing them. For too many years this was the case in Angola. And yet—right now—our political class has an historic opportunity to change rhythm. Will our leaders learn to march to the beat the people want to hear?

President João Lourenço came to power just over a year ago with a vow to challenge the status quo established by his own party, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the ruling MPLA.

Under José Eduardo dos Santos, the collective leadership of the ruling party institutionalized corruption as a way of life. It began to seem that the primary purpose for those who held political power

in Angola was to loot and pillage. They enriched themselves while stamping their boot in the face of critics and opponents. It was the era of insatiable and wicked wolves and the rest of society had to adapt to survive.

Over the past year there have been heartening signs of change. First and foremost, President Lourenço has begun to address the scourge of corruption, making it clear that his peers in the highest reaches of the ruling party no longer enjoy impunity. . . . Secondly, President Lourenço can be credited with encouraging greater freedom of expression and fostering new space for dialogue and accountability. He has shown good will, seemingly wanting to make things right.

For the first time in the country's recent history there are signs that all relevant sectors of society embrace the same desire for change, starting with the dismantling of the pervasive greed and institutionalized corruption of the Dos Santos era that fueled so much dysfunction, inefficiency and violent repression. . . .

For real democracy to take root in Angola there has to be constitutional reform to establish a basic system of checks and balances on the actions of the President of the Republic. President Lourenço's statements of good intention cannot be a substitute for the devolution of such powers to the state institutions. Instead of accepting the status quo that allows him to be just another African strong-man dispensing largesse, President Lourenço should be encouraged to be a visionary reformist, restoring the balance of powers between the democratic estates, ensuring that all from the highest to the lowest in the land respect the rule of law.

The choice facing João Lourenço is whether to succumb to the temptation of accepting the unchecked powers granted him or to follow Mandela's example, eschewing personal power and enrichment for the greater good.

Czech Republic

On October 18 the embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC hosted a conference in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Washington Declaration, which created independent Czechoslovakia. The theme of the conference was "From Masaryk to Havel and Beyond: The Struggle for Democracy." Excerpts from the keynote address by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright are presented below:

Some 72 years after the Washington Declaration was issued . . . Václav Havel traveled to this city as the newly inaugurated president of a democratic Czechoslovakia. . . . We thought back then that the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century were in remission, that the out-

moded concepts of imperialism and spheres of interest were discredited, and that the danger of big countries gobbling up the small had been reduced. But the future is shaped not only by what we learn from the past, but also by what we forget. Evil tides may be driven back, but it is in the nature of tides to return.

And today, there can be no doubt that the principles enshrined in the Washington Declaration are under attack. Extreme nationalist movements, tinged with racism and pro-Fascist symbols, are gaining in popularity everywhere from Italy to Scandinavia. Key governments—including American allies Hungary, the Philippines, Poland and Turkey—are moving away from their democratic heritage. It seems as though everywhere you look—including, I regret to say, the United States and Czech Republic—there are politicians propagating conspiracy theories designed to nurture hate and fear among average citizens, who encourage followers to lash out at people who differ from themselves, and who promise simple solutions to hard problems.

Meanwhile, democracy's authoritarian enemies have become increasingly bold and outspoken. These adversaries, such as Vladimir Putin, are turning to sophisticated new tools to extend their influence and undermine confidence in democracy. They have put the very notion of truth under a concerted and intentional assault.

I am not one of those who believe that we are enmeshed in a clash of civilizations, but I do believe we face a battle of ideas. And democracy's friends have been ill-prepared for that fight. In part, that is because we did not pay enough attention to leaders such as Václav Havel, who urged us to treat the Cold War's end not as the conclusion of a bitter struggle but as the beginning of a new and even greater challenge. If Havel or Masaryk were here today, I am sure that they would tell us that it is not too late for us to regain the upper hand. But they would also undoubtedly assure us that we can do better. . . .

Today, there is an urgent need for small-d democrats everywhere to stand together and vow that we will not allow the peddlers of hate to shape our future. We will not allow them to turn us against one another or to treat our neighbors with contempt. We will not allow them to hijack the institutions that ensure our freedom and define our democracies. We will not abandon all that we have gained through decades of shared sacrifice. We will not remain silent as they strive to drain meaning from words and to convince us that up is down, wrong is right, and truth is whatever they claim it to be.

Instead, in every country and from all parts of the political spectrum, we must insist on the integrity of our own minds, the importance of democratic values, the rights of minorities, and the dignity of every human being. Because with those beliefs behind us, I am convinced that there is no threat before us against which we cannot prevail—if we heed the warning, and if we are prepared to fight.