

**World Forum on Democracy
Warsaw, Poland - 25-27 June 2000**

**REPORT
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The Forum of Federations recently took part in the first World Forum on Democracy Conference in Warsaw, Poland, 25-27 June 2000. The Conference was sponsored by Freedom House, a non-profit U.S. organization advancing the cause of freedom and democracy around the world, and the Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland's largest non-governmental foundation devoted to promoting democracy and the development of civil society. The purpose of the World Forum was to provide an opportunity for representatives from a wide range of non-governmental organizations to discuss salient issues in the ongoing process of democratization, and the implications of the globalization phenomenon for that process, from the unique perspective of the civil society sector.

The World Forum on Democracy coincided with a meeting of the foreign ministers of 103 of the world's democratic countries at a conference entitled "Towards a Community of Democracies". The ministerial conference was endorsed by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and jointly organized by the governments of Poland, the United States, Mali, South Korea, India, Chile and the Czech Republic. The purpose of the event was to provide a forum for democratic practitioners from around the world to gather and discuss many of the same issues as were addressed by the World Forum, but from the particular vantage point of democratic governments.

On the morning of Tuesday, 27 June, a delegation from the World Forum addressed the ministerial conference, offering a summary of the discussion generated by the civil society sector. This delegation consisted of: Jose Ramos-Horta, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate; Bette Bao Lord, Chairman, Freedom House; and Alexander Smolar, President, Stefan Batory Foundation. At present, it is difficult to anticipate the precise character of the relationship between the ministerial conference and the World Forum. However, any attempt to enhance the cooperative efforts between government and civil society in the pursuit of democratic goals and principles could be viewed as a step in the right direction. The overall agenda of the World Forum was punctuated by presentations from such prominent speakers as Jerzy Buzek, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland; Michel Rocard, former Prime Minister of France; Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of the Republic of Mali; Madeleine Albright, U.S. Secretary of State, and; Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Perhaps one of the more poignant presentations made to the World Forum was that of Alejandro Toledo, President, Partido Peru Posible, one of the leading contenders for the

Presidency of Peru. Referring to recent publicity over unfair election practices in Peru, Mr. Toledo argued that the globalization phenomenon mandates an international interest in the adherence to legitimate democratic principles, as well as in the actual outcome of democratic elections. Mr. Toledo concluded his speech with a personal pledge to persevere in his quest to promote democratic values in Peru.

Certainly, one of the highlights of the World Forum was the keynote address delivered by George Soros, Chairman, Open Society Institute and Soros Fund Management. Mr. Soros sought to address the practical dilemma of how to implement democratic principles within the context of a global governance framework. In his address, Mr. Soros warned against the creation of too many “unholy alliances” between the business sector and government. His basic thesis was that these alliances have the potential to undermine both programs in development assistance and concurrent attempts to strengthen the international institutions that would play a valuable role in a global governance framework. In essence, Mr. Soros put forth the argument that, in order to become realities, ideas such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law ought not to be subjected to the market forces that so often enjoy an exaggerated influence within the community of donor countries.

Mr. Soros went on to argue that the principle challenge to the implementation of a global governance mechanism is the question of individual state sovereignty, and that the agency of civil society may be a key element in the resolution of the challenges posed by sovereignty. However, he also notes that in order for such a role to be made accessible to civil society, a fundamental shift in the way development aid is provided would have to take place. That is to say that the motivation behind the distribution of foreign aid will have to shift from one that is rooted in donor interests, to one that is focused on recipient needs.

These initial keynote addresses on the first day of the conference seemed to set the tone for the remainder of the event as the idea of democratization within the broader framework of globalization became something of a recurring theme. Indeed, the discussion panel entitled “Globalization and Democracy” featured such notable speakers as: Benjamin Barber, Director, Walt Whitman Center, Rutgers University; Francis Fukuyama, Hirst Professor of Public Policy, George Mason University; Bolivar Lamounier, Research Director, Sao Paulo Institute for Economic, Social and Political Studies, and; Fred Van Leeuwen, General Secretary, Education International. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that this was easily the most popular discussion panel of the first day of the conference.

Of course, this fortunate turn of events provided a highly appropriate build up to the discussion panel organized by the **Forum of Federations** at the end of the second day of conference activities, which was entitled “Federalism, Multi-Ethnic Society and Democracy”. Ralph Lysyshyn, President of the Forum of Federations, chaired the panel. In his opening remarks Mr. Lysyshyn stressed the need for democratic governments to remain diligent in their efforts to make democracy work in the complex international environment of the 21st century. Mr. Lysyshyn also made note of the potential value of the principles of federalism in the ongoing struggle to reconcile differences in a democratic context.

Yogendra Yadav, Director, Institute for Comparative Democracy, India, provided a thorough examination of the politics of ethnic diversity and the relationship between

democracy, ethnicities and the politics of differences. In so doing, Dr. Yadav built upon the remarks offered by Mr. Lysyshyn and indeed, on much of the discussion that had been generated by the World Forum as a whole. In his presentation, Dr. Yadav argued that a deep connection exists between democracy and federalism, in so far as federalism provides an institutional mechanism for managing and negotiating the politics of difference, be they based on ethnic, religious, or any other set of criteria. Dr. Yadav concluded by stressing the importance of not taking the depth of this relationship for granted and of not falling into the trap of viewing federalism as merely a tool, but rather as an institutional ideal and organizational framework that is implicit within all true democracies.

Aaron Gana, Executive Director, African Centre for Democratic Governance, Nigeria, then provided a concise analysis of the Nigerian case, in which a vibrant civil society has worked to promote the principles of federalism in the face of military rule for more than two decades. Dr. Gana outlined how civil society and federal principles merge well together in the effort to achieve “unity in diversity” in Nigeria. While Dr. Gana acknowledged that a great deal of work remains to be done in the area of firmly establishing a sustainable democratic tradition in Nigeria, he offers a great deal of credit to the agency of civil society and the value of federalism in facilitating the democratic transition that occurred in Nigeria on 29 May 1999.

The third panel discussant on the Forum’s session was Mara Hernandez, Coordinator of Mexicans Abroad for the Campaign Committee of Vicente Fox. Ms. Hernandez provided the session with an insider’s perspective on Mexican federalism in the context of the 2000 Mexican Presidential election race. For the past seventy-one years the PRI party has dominated Mexican politics. Ms. Hernandez’s presentation offered a look into the effect of a one party political system on the structure of federal systems and the implications for the devolution of power to subsidiary levels of government. Of particular interest was her observation that the emergence of opposition parties at lower levels of government in recent years has resulted in the loss of majority rule in the lower chamber by the PRI, and has also enabled opposition parties to occupy as many as one third of the State Governor positions in Mexico.

Judy Cavanagh, Deputy minister, Government Priorities, Government of British Columbia, Canada, concluded the opening remarks of the Forum’s plenary session. Ms. Cavanagh provided the panel with the benefit of a practitioner’s insights into the challenges that face efforts at multi-level governance. Her presentation focused on a document known as the “Vancouver Agreement”, which represents an important experiment in Canadian federalism. This experiment attempts to define the roles of municipal, provincial and federal agencies, as they relate to a specific program aimed at revitalizing an historic neighbourhood in the city of Vancouver by combating the effects of urban decay and its concomitant symptoms: open air narcotics trafficking and usage, street side prostitution, violence, etc.

The format of the session provided the attendees of the panel discussion an opportunity to hear first hand accounts of the experiences of experts in federalism who come from a variety of backgrounds and who, therefore, were able to offer a diversity of insights into salient issues for federal systems of governance. Attendees were then able to engage the panelists directly in a discussion of a wide range of specific issues, from the challenges

and complexities of intergovernmental relations to the relevance of federal principles to ideas associated with globalization and world government. The end result of this arrangement was that the discussants, together with members of the audience, were able to examine some of the broad ranging challenges associated with globalization and democracy, in an open and highly focused dialogue, with very practical emphasis.

Forum of Federations / Forum des fédérations
forum@forumfed.org
