**4. Democratization**
**How can genuine democracy emerge from authoritarian regimes?**

World democracy and freedom have declined for the third year in a row, according to Freedom House’s 2009 survey. It lists 34 countries that declined while 14 improved during 2008. This survey found that press freedoms declined for the seventh year in a row. It estimates that only 17% of the world’s population lives in 70 countries with a free press, while 42% lives in 64 countries with no free press. The Committee to Protect Journalists noted that at the end of 2008, for the first time, there were more online journalists detained than traditional journalists. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2008 Democracy Index has 14.4% of humanity enjoying full democracy, while 35% live in authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, over the past three decades, democracy grew rapidly: countries rated “free” increased from 47 to 89 (representing 46% of the world’s population); those “partly free” increased from 56 to 62; and those “not free” decreased from 55 to 42 (representing 34% of world’s population).

Democratic forces will have to work harder to make sure that the short-term reversals do not stop the longer-term trend of democratization. Aging populations are increasing, and their countries tend to maintain democratic gains more than countries with younger populations. Some of the factors nurturing democratic values include international news and media systems including their access to pro-democratic actors, international interdependence, long-term economic stability, increasing literacy, global participation creating ISOs, the UN and its related treaties, multi-polarity and multilateralism in decision making, self-organizing interest groups via the Internet, an increased focus on citizen participation, the evolution and globalization of business systems, developments that force global cooperation (such as the financial crisis, terrorism, and climate change), improved quality of governance assessment systems including e-government with Internet access and transparent judicial systems, the growth of NGOs, and the emergence of a global civic identity with a focus on citizen participation.

Although the perception and implementation of democracy differ globally, it is generally accepted that democracy is a relationship between a responsible citizenry and a responsive government that encourages participation in the political process and guarantees basic rights.

Individuals and groups can self-organize around common ideals via the Internet, independent of conventional institutional controls and regardless of nationality or languages. Injustices in different parts of the world become the concern of thousands or millions of people who then pressure local, regional, or international governing systems to find solutions. This unparalleled social power is reinventing citizens’ roles in the political process and changing institutions, policymaking, and governance. Direct voting on issues via the Internet should be considered to augment representative democracy. However, methods to counter information manipulation and policies to ensure Internet freedom are needed for further democratic evolution. New systems to guarantee legitimate elections are needed.

Structures have to be developed to assure migrants’ integration and fair participation in policymaking while also respecting the democratic values of the host country. UNHCR is launching an annual Global Needs Assessment for the status of the world’s refugees and people of concern under its mandate. Possibly a billion people will migrate over the next 50 years for environmental, social, or economic reasons. International procedures are needed to assist failed states or regions within states, and intervention strategies are needed when a state constitutes a significant threat to its citizens or others. New accountability mechanisms are being developed for enforcing democracy, such as the Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council, which is a mechanism to examine the record of every member state, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that enables victims of human rights violations to complain at the international level. There are 41 Parties to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Although making development assistance dependent on good governance has helped in some countries, genuine democracy will be achieved when local people—not external actors—demand government accountability. Organized crime, methods to tamper with election results, information warfare, and the potential of individuals to make and use weapons of mass destruction should be seriously addressed the long-range trend toward democracy can be maintained, then the world should be moving toward a more peaceful future, because democracies tend not to fight each other and because humanitarian crises are far more likely under authoritarian than democratic regimes.

Challenge 4 will be addressed seriously when strategies to address these threats are in place, when less than 10% of the world lives in nondemocratic countries, when the number of armed conflicts (those with 1,000 or more deaths per year) diminishes by half, and when voter participation in most democracies exceeds 60% in most elections.

**Regional Considerations**

**Africa:** Cape Verde’s e-government includes e-voting, which tallies votes within minutes of poll closings. Freedom House rated 10 of the 48 countries in the region “free,” 23 “partly free,” and 15 “not free.” About one-fourth of the region experienced setbacks in 2008, notably Senegal, Mauritania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Somalia. African countries have yet to ratify the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance adopted by the African Union in 2007, which sets democratic standards to be met by African governments and provides a framework for assessing progress.

**Asia and Oceania:** Freedom House rated 16 of Asia’s 39 countries as “free,” 15 “partly free,” and 8 “not free,” and noted that nearly three-fifths of the world population living in “not free” countries are in China. This year’s successful elections in India continue the world’s largest democracy. Despite international efforts, sectarian divides and fundamentalism undermine democratization in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries in the region. In the Middle East, Israel remains the only country rated “free,” while 61% of the region’s population lives in 11 “not free” countries. The Arab League could play an important role in improving democracy in this region.

**Europe:** All 27 EU countries are rated “free.” The region has the world’s greatest press freedom and supports public participation in policymaking. However, the falling fertility rates and increasing migration from Africa and Asia, which is poorly integrated, are increasing ethnic tensions, making nationalism and cultural differences sensitive topics. Currently 8 million illegal immigrants are estimated to be in the EU. The binding mechanisms of the new EU asylum system are to be set up by 2012. In most Central and East European (non-EU) countries, the tendency toward autocracy, corruption, and lack of progressive institutions continues to hinder the democratization process. Top Russian government officials and their families have to list their incomes and property on a Web site as part of a plan against corruption.

**Latin America:** Despite economic and social difficulties, the region maintains its democratization progress. Freedom House rates 23 of the region’s 33 countries “free” and only 1 (Cuba) “not free.” However, increases in organized crime, corruption, censorship, and intimidation against media as well as expansion of terms for heads of state raise concerns. Although youth are taught democratic principles, ECLAC notes that an average of 69% feel they suffer discrimination mainly because of poverty and under-education. Some political parties still maintain the ideological vision from a bipolar world, with less attention to new problems and opportunities of globalization.

**North America:** The election of the first biracial president strengthens U.S. democratic culture, stimulates broader public participation in the political processes, and may engage greater international collaboration. Nevertheless, concerns persist over powerful lobbies, electoral processes, corruption, and centralization of media in Canada and the U.S. Direct voting on issues via the Internet should be considered to augment representative democracy.

**Graph:** Global trends in freedom

Source: *Freedom in the World 2009*, Freedom House

