



**GLOBAL  
DEMOCRACY  
COALITION**



**YOUTH  
DEMOCRACY  
COHORT**

# Communiqué

**Citizens Summit in Defense of  
Democracy & Freedom**

**Lusaka, Zambia**

**30 March 2023**

WE, THE CITIZENS of Africa, gathered in Lusaka, Zambia, for the Citizens Summit in Defence of Democracy and Freedom, on the 27th and 28th of March 2023,

UNITED in our commitment to building, strengthening, and sustaining democracy on our continent.

APPRECIATING AND RECOGNISING that African citizens remain deeply committed to democracy and accountable government and have an unyielding belief that honest and accountable government is the only way our people can rise to meet the pressing challenges that confront our states.

RECOGNISING that while the demand for democracy is high, supply remains low and, in some cases, is in decline.

MINDFUL that democracy must yield socio-political and economic dividends for ordinary citizens in practical and tangible ways through peace, greater freedom, prosperity, and better quality of life; that bridges the gap between the rich and poor.

ACKNOWLEDGING that the structures and foundations of democracy are based on the choices and joint efforts of the citizens of this continent and that people are at the center of the building and sustaining democracy.

CONCERNED by the continued shrinking of democratic and civic space across the continent and the apparent capture and manipulation of state institutions in some countries to serve causes other than democracy and to advance partisan and sectarian interests.

DETERMINED to work hand in hand with our governments to protect democratic gains on the African continent and push back on democratic backsliding and decline.

REAFFIRMING our commitment to freedom of expression and free media as key cornerstones of democracy

RESOLUTE in our belief that freedom matters and that it is integral for our democracies to work in ways that prioritise fairness and justice, security and safety, and prosperity for all people, and;

CONFIDENT in the knowledge that democracies should embrace accountability, oversight, peer-review, and new ideas.

## **THEREFORE, RESOLVE AND RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING TO THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY:**

### **On youth engagement in democratic processes and spaces**

1. That states and all stakeholders must find ways to ensure that young people participate, speak and be heard, engage, and use their creative energies for the good of the continent and to ensure their presence at the decision-making table. Governments must facilitate their effective participation in democratic processes. Africa will benefit immensely by capitalising on the democratic dividend of a growing youthful population.
2. That state actors and non-state actors alike, including civil society and the private sector, prioritise the effective participation of young people in governance and economic spaces and that young people themselves must continue to actively pursue effective non-tokenistic participation that allows their voices to be heard and integrated into policymaking.
3. That partners for democracy across civil society and state institutions, through a range of interventions and the provision of resources, facilitate the capacitating and building of knowledge for young people on democracy and electoral issues, including through supporting, encouraging, facilitating, and accommodating young people with a full agency to engage on issues of democracy.
4. Civil society groups in Africa, through a Call to Action prepared by the Youth Democracy Cohort, calls for all Summit for Democracy stakeholders to strengthen youth participation beyond the second summit in three domains: to engage young people in Summit for Democracy cohorts, to include young people in stakeholders post-Summit planning; and for governments to make at least one commitment on youth political participation within six months of the 2nd Summit for Democracy – concerning a menu of possible commitments prepared by the Youth Democracy Cohort to help enhance youth participation around 33 actionable and specific recommendations.

### **On media freedom and free expression**

5. That states, African leaders, and partners for democracy address media-related threats to democracy and increase media freedom and safety and security for journalists as a critical feature of our democracies.
6. That states African leaders and partners for democracy continue to promote open and safe digital spaces and governance devoid of internet shutdowns, cyber censorship, attacks, misinformation, and disinformation.
7. That states and partners for democracy desist from sponsoring draconian media regulations and cybersecurity laws, which are becoming the new frontiers for restricting free expression on and offline.

8. That democracies and partners for democracy review and sanction each other and intransigent authorities without fear or favour, when there are media freedom and digital platform violations.

9. That states and partners for democracy recognise the value of knowledge, information exchange, and free expression and the need to protect journalists and journalism. At the same time, laws and regulations must facilitate and enable the free exchange of information on and offline.

### **On civic and democratic space**

10. That our governments recognise that democracy cannot be consolidated without an open and vibrant civic space that allows citizens to be at the centre of democratic processes and building.

11. That our governments desist and discourage their peers from threatening civic space and sponsoring repressive non-governmental organisations (NGO) laws under the guise of advancing noble causes but which have the effect of constricting organised civil society.

12. We demand that all governments that have put in place restrictive CSO laws roll them back immediately as there is no place in democratic societies for laws that undermine fundamental freedoms.

13. That across Africa, many pro-democracy groups, and individuals that, include activists, civil society actors, the media, artists, and human rights defenders, operate in precarious conditions of fear, reprisals, attacks, and threats. This undermines the contribution of citizens to democratic practice and participation in democratic processes outside of spaces organised by the State.

14. Governments must embrace their international obligations and constitutional responsibilities to protect and implement effective and resourced mechanisms to promote and protect human rights defenders.

15. That, even in moments of disaster and emergency, aptly illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, governments must commit to disaster and emergency responses that protect and promote human rights, good governance, democratic practice, and open and safe civic space.

### **On elections and electoral practice**

16. That, governments, and partners for democracy commit to strengthening and enhancing the integrity of elections as the most visible expression of popular democracy that can allow for genuinely representative governance of the people by the people.

17. While the quantity of elections has increased, their quality, integrity, freeness, and fairness to ensure genuine electoral contestation remains low. Poor-quality elections in Africa are threat multipliers to the tenets of democracy. Undemocratic elections in Africa threaten freedoms of speech, expression, association, and assembly. Elections are in many ways performative, without procedural certainty but rife with the certainty of outcomes.

18. We enjoin our governments and other partners for democracy to promote, encourage and support genuine democratic ballots where there is process certainty and outcome uncertainty and where the people's will is respected.

19. We encourage our governments, The African Union, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to insist on sound electoral practices per the African Charter on Democracy, Governance, and Elections and regional protocols for conducting democratic elections.

20. We urge our governments to commit to standardising legal frameworks on political financing to promote accountability, and transparency in the financing of political parties, election campaigns, and referenda. This includes strengthening institutions that offer political finance oversight in line with article 7.3 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which calls on states to take appropriate legislative and administrative measures to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and political parties.

21. We encourage the African Union (AU) to coordinate with African States to pass a resolution on a joint standard for political finance and set up a peer review mechanism on political finance at continental and national levels. There must be international support for operationalization of best practices in political party and campaign finance. Political finance must be approached holistically through effective interagency collaboration, coordination and oversight, extensive citizen engagement, and the integration of indigenous approaches that foster transparency and accountability, bearing in mind the local context.

22. We urge our governments to actively promote, strengthen, and encourage citizen engagement and participation throughout the electoral cycle, including by providing an enabling environment for such participation.

23. We urge our governments and partners for democracy to facilitate the active involvement of all stakeholders in the private sector, civil society, and academia in political and government processes. Inclusivity, consultation, engagement, representation, and participation are hallmarks of democratic practice.

24. We encourage the African Union to continue working with citizens and democracy stakeholders to condemn unconstitutional changes of government and facilitate greater citizen engagement, including their active participation in election observation missions.

**WE** commit to working together as citizens with other democracy stakeholders and our governments to realise the consolidation of democracy on our continent.

30 March 2023

LUSAKA, REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA



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