



## **Amma's Message**

### **International Day of Democracy – 15 September**

The International Day of Democracy provides an opportunity to review the state of democracy in the world. Democracy is as much a process as a goal. It is only with the full participation of and support by the international community, national governments, common people, and individuals can the ideal of democracy be made into a reality to be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere.

The values of freedom, respect for human rights, holding free and fair elections by universal suffrage, with women having the right to vote, are essential elements of democracy. In turn, democracy provides the natural environment for the protection and effective realization of human rights. These values are embodied in the most fundamental document of the United Nations - Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and further developed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which embodies political rights and civil liberties, so vital for all democracies.

The rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and subsequent human rights instruments covering group rights (e.g. Indigenous, minorities, people with disabilities) are equally essential for democracy as they ensure an equitable distribution of wealth, and equality and equity in respect of access to civil and political rights.

Let us commit to safeguarding the principles of equality, participation and solidarity, so that we can better weather the storm of future crises.

Many of the targets of Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals are geared towards protecting democratic institutions, including:

- Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
  - Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
  - Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
  - Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
  - Guarantee public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
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### **Strengthening democratic resilience in the face of future crises**

The unprecedented COVID-19 crisis has resulted in major social, political and legal challenges globally. As states around the world adopt emergency measures to address the crisis, it is critical that they continue to uphold the rule of law, protect and respect international standards and basic principles of legality, and the right to access justice and due process.

The United Nations has urged governments to be transparent, responsible and act with integrity in their COVID-19 response and ensure that any emergency measures are legal, proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory. While governments have to respond to threats, they must also protect human rights and the rule of law. We must also protect the freedom of expression and press freedom. We must also prevent arrest, detention, prosecution or persecution of political opponents, journalists, doctors and healthcare workers, activists, and not be accused of fake news when they are telling the truth about science. We must also know how best to counter harmful speech while protecting freedom of expression. We must make efforts to eliminate misinformation or disinformation. The most effective response is accurate, clear and evidence-based information from sources people trust.

Around the world civil society organizations have answered the UN's call to action to address and counteract the wide range of ways the Covid-19 crisis may impair democracy and increase authoritarianism, by:

- empowering women against gender-based violence, which has surged amid COVID-19 lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures;
- helping to highlight the challenges of inequality and weak service delivery made worse by the crisis. We need to focus on the needs and rights of women,

youth, minorities and other marginalized populations, and hold governments to account for not protecting them.

- developing media literacy and digital safety;
- fighting misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, which have mushroomed in the crisis;
- training journalists remotely to report on the impact of the pandemic with in-depth, fact-checked coverage, while staying safe on the front line.

