

Sunnylands Initiative in Sydney SUMMARY

A summary of the [Sunnylands Initiative Statement 2023](#)

The Sunnylands Initiative was established in January 2020 to advance a vision for cooperation on strengthening democratic governance norms in the Indo-Pacific region. Recognizing a lack of regional infrastructure to defend freedom, human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and an international rules-based order, thought leaders from Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Taiwan, Timor-Leste, and the United States gathered on the lands of the Gayamagal People in Sydney, Australia, to reaffirm the [Sunnylands Principles on Enhancing Democratic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific Region](#), and to launch action plans in pursuit of an Indo-Pacific region governed by respect for universal democratic values.

Geopolitical tensions have brought to the fore both threats and opportunities for strengthening democracy. The participants view with deep concern developments in parts of the Indo-Pacific that include increased targeting and jailing of political leaders and opposition voices; systemic violations of minority rights; the erosion of women's human rights; repression of civil society; attacks on media and freedom of expression; and growing polarization and disinformation eroding open societies.

At the same time, however, there is reason for cautious optimism. Amid a global slowing of what was once a rapid deterioration of rights and freedoms, Freedom House found that levels of freedom in the Indo-Pacific slightly improved in 2022.

Governments in the region are also doing more than ever before to support democratic governance. In March 2023, Asian partners gathered in Seoul for a second Summit for Democracy focused on anti-corruption. We applaud the Republic of Korea for committing US\$100 million over three years in support of development projects contributing to democracy assistance. The summit in Seoul reinforced the importance of regional leadership on democracy and collaborative efforts. We encourage all governments to support and follow the Republic of Korea's leadership in implementing a more inclusive process for the 2024 Summit for Democracy, which will bolster Indo-Pacific stewardship of the democracy agenda. The emergence of the [Indo-Pacific Platform for Universal Values](#) also indicates important progress, as does the Japanese government's support for universal values in its 2022 National Security Strategy and 2023 Development Cooperation Charter. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the Biketawa Declaration by the Pacific Islands Forum set out Pacific Island nations' own vision for a coordinated regional effort towards common democratic values. Countries seeking to have inclusive and enduring partnerships with Pacific Island nations should consider this regionally-sought vision in their democratic engagement.

The 25 participants at this third iteration of the Sunnylands Initiative formed three working groups to provide concrete action plans in three specific areas: Partnering for Democracy, Democracy Advocates at Risk, and Anti-Corruption.

Partnering for Democracy

- We encourage governments and civil society groups to:
 - establish a forecasting mechanism to help identify gaps or needs in civil society across the region.
 - create a regional cooperative framework to support civil society and independent media.
- We encourage governments to:
 - respect civil societies domestically, while donors should elevate the prominence and coordination of their civil society support.

- explore an initiative in the Pacific Islands that would strengthen civil society, while working with governments, as articulated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.
- coordinate within multilateral fora most notably the APEC, ASEAN, Commonwealth of Nations, East Asia Summit, Pacific Islands Forum, and the Quad.
- We encourage donor nations and organizations to support Pacific Island nations' priorities of climate security, climate justice, and human-centred development.
- The Sunnylands Initiative will convene a dialogue series to include key government and non-governmental stakeholders across the region to strengthen understanding and the application of shared democratic principles in policymaking and democratization support at every level.

Democracy Advocates at Risk

- The Sunnylands Initiative will:
 - establish a network of universities, think tanks, NGOs, faith-based groups, and other stakeholders to host democracy advocates at risk within the region.
 - develop a strategic plan and mission to present to potential partner, member, and donor organizations within this network.
 - identify hub coordinators within each country to lead this work domestically.
- We encourage governments to endorse, support, and partner with the Sunnylands Initiative on these efforts.

Anti-Corruption

- Each nation should:
 - advance financial integrity and transparency domestically and as a priority in its foreign policy, development, and democratic partnership efforts.
 - promote comprehensive, collaborative, and global approaches to anti-corruption watchdogs, enforcement, and accountability mechanisms.
 - bolster whole of government anti-corruption capabilities, strengthen the role of civil society, and a free and capable media.
 - strengthen collaboration, information sharing, and investigations across borders.
- Donor nations and international organizations should support technical assistance and capacity building to counter financial crime.
- The Sunnylands Initiative will convene stakeholders to identify a program of action in support of the Republic of Korea's initiative on anti-corruption.

The Indo-Pacific is dynamic and there are differences among us. Still, one thing is clear in every nation: the people of the Indo-Pacific universally desire freedom, stability, and prosperity.

We urge governments in the region to reaffirm their commitment to democracy that delivers and the protection of fundamental human rights, prioritize their support for democratic governance norms, and cooperate with like-minded countries and stakeholders in such efforts.

We look forward to meeting next year to benchmark our progress on these recommendations.

Sydney, Australia
April 5, 2023