

Stockholm International Democracy Talks – A part of Drive for Democracy

Stockholm International Democracy Talks was held in virtual format on 28–29 October 2021, with over 100 democracy actors and human rights defenders from over 30 countries around the world. Discussions centred around global challenges for democracy and human rights, and how to strengthen and support human rights defenders and civil society actors. Sweden's Ministers for Foreign Affairs and for International Development Cooperation participated alongside representatives of civil society and experts in panels and group discussions.

Stockholm International Democracy Talks took place as a part of the Swedish Government's foreign policy initiative Drive for Democracy. Launched in 2019, the Drive is a response and counter-narrative to global democratic backsliding and growing authoritarianism. The meeting brought together actors from local "Democracy Talks", which have engaged more than 10 000 people worldwide in discussions on the challenges facing democracy and human rights.

The following is a selection of the conclusions emanating from the discussions:

- Democratic principles are being threatened, and respect for the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association is on the decline. Democratic institutions are being weakened and the democratic space, not least for civil society, is shrinking. Today and every day, democracy and its principles need to be promoted and protected.
- Civil society actors are crucial for safeguarding and revitalising democracy. Support to civil society must continue, not least to human rights defenders, environmental human rights defenders, trade unionists and workers. These efforts must include ensuring their participation in local, regional, and international forums. A good understanding of local and historical context is key.



- The presence of the international community can play a crucial role in supporting human rights defenders and democracy actors, for example during trials, both in terms of solidarity and for the actual outcomes.
- The issue of massive prevailing inequalities has a severe impact on democratic legitimacy. Discussions about rethinking and renegotiating the social contract must be encouraged.
- Young people must be able to effectively participate in democracy and decision-making. At the same time, young people should not be seen as a homogenous group, but rather as a wide range of actors representing a diverse set of voices.
- Gender equality and women's enjoyment of human rights must be safeguarded, and a feminist perspective must be integrated into all policies. The tools are often in place, but actions are lacking.
- In contexts where press freedom is under pressure or attack, civil society and media actors must be able to work together in networks in order to support each other. The international community can provide support financially or by facilitating dialogue.
- Respect for human rights must permeate business and trade practices, and responsible businesses should be highlighted as frontrunners to raise the bar. However, businesses do not act in a vacuum, and it is equally important that states continue to adapt national action plans on business and human rights.
- The participants emphasised that Sweden should continue to facilitate dialogue on democratic challenges across the world, not least through the continuation of Democracy Talks, financial support to democracy and human rights defenders and staying engaged in various local contexts.

In Stockholm and at our missions abroad, Sweden will make use of the outcomes of Stockholm International Democracy Talks to carry forward the Drive for Democracy. Join us and follow our work #drivefordemocracy!

