

## **The Summit for Democracy December 9-10, 2021**

### **Background and Information**

U.S. President Joe Biden has committed to revitalizing democracy as a domestic and foreign policy imperative, to standing for human rights around the world, to fighting corruption globally, and to making clear that America's commitment to democracy and human rights is central to his administration's efforts to revitalize U.S. alliances and partnerships. As President Biden emphasized in his first foreign policy address as president, on February 4, 2021, if the United States is to succeed in meeting the many challenges we face today, "we must start with diplomacy rooted in America's most cherished democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity. That's our inexhaustible source of strength."

Democracy and human rights are under considerable stress, both in the United States and around the world. In the United States, we confront a number of serious challenges, including deepening polarization across society, mis- and disinformation, and low levels of trust in government. Simultaneously, far too many Americans continue to suffer inequities, disenfranchisement, and abuses of their rights solely on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Recognizing that equal opportunity is a fundamental principle of American democracy, the Biden-Harris Administration has made advancing equity and equality a cornerstone of its domestic policy agenda.

Abroad, both longstanding and newer democracies are threatened by anti-democratic backlashes, corruption, and a lack of faith in public institutions. New transnational threats have also emerged, including from authoritarian leaders using their resources, influence, and technology to take advantage of open societies through interference in election systems and political processes, as well as by reaching across borders to target activists, journalists, and critics. Meanwhile, people in every corner of the globe face threats to their enjoyment of universal human rights from repressive governments, enduring inequities, conflict, corruption, discrimination and bias, criminal activities, and the climate crisis.

To respond to these challenges, and conscious of democracy's boundless potential for renewal, President Biden has announced that on December 9-10, 2021, he will join leaders from around the world at a Summit for Democracy. President Biden intends for the Summit to provide an opportunity for world leaders to listen, learn, and share how governments and non-governmental actors can strengthen their commitment to democratic principles and practices. The Summit will bring together members of civil society, the private sector, and leaders from a diverse group of democracies to discuss how they can together advance the Summit's three broad themes: strengthening democracy and defending against authoritarianism; addressing and fighting corruption; and advancing respect for human rights.

The United States envisions the Summit for Democracy as an extraordinary opportunity to galvanize attention and mobilize international action. Accordingly, together with partners, we intend to announce at the Summit a number of new policy and resource commitments, with a

particular focus on areas such as: supporting free and independent media; fighting corruption; bolstering democratic reformers; advancing technology for democracy; and defending free and fair elections.

Following the Summit, we look forward to working with governmental and non-governmental partners in a year of consultation, coordination, and action (“year of action”), after which time President Biden intends to again gather world leaders to showcase our collective progress.

The Biden-Harris Administration believes firmly that renewing democracy begins by working diligently and transparently to strengthen its foundations at home. Demonstrating that democracy can deliver to improve people’s lives and address the greatest challenges of our time is at the heart of the Biden-Harris Administration’s plan to Build Back Better. The Administration continues to take decisive actions to reinvigorate and strengthen American democracy, steps we look forward to showcasing at the Summit. These include:

### **Strengthening Democracy and Countering Authoritarianism**

- Protecting the right to vote in free, fair, and secure elections. President Biden has used his executive authority to enhance all Americans’ freedom to vote, including through issuing a sweeping Executive Order directing all federal agencies to take action within their authority to promote access to voting. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice has doubled its staff devoted to voting rights. This investment is already paying off, as evidenced by the Department issuing formal guidance on the federal laws that govern elections and bringing enforcement actions against recent threats to voting rights.
- Galvanizing Civic Engagement. The Administration is investing in national service programs to bring together people from different backgrounds to serve their community and country in common purpose, harnessing the power of civic engagement to tackle some of our nation’s most pressing challenges. The American Rescue Plan provided \$1 billion to make service opportunities more accessible to all Americans, and the Administration is creating a new Public Health Corps and Civilian Climate Corps.
- Supporting and Protecting Independent Media. The U.S. Department of Justice changed long-standing policy to now prohibit prosecutors from using compulsory legal process to obtain information from or records of members of the news media acting within the scope of newsgathering activities.
- Countering Domestic Extremism. In June, the White House released the first-ever U.S. National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, which directs a government-wide effort to improve the federal response to this challenge, while safeguarding bedrock American civil rights and civil liberties

### **Fighting Corruption**

- Fighting Corruption and Promoting Financial Transparency. In June, President Biden issued a National Security Study Memorandum establishing the fight against corruption

as a core U.S. national security interest and government-wide priority. Pursuant to the Memorandum, U.S. departments and agencies are currently at work developing new policies, programs, and proposals on how to work with partners to curb illicit finance, effectively hold corrupt actors accountable, build stronger international partnerships, and improve foreign assistance.

### **Promoting Respect for Human Rights**

- Advancing Racial Equity. In its first days in office, the Biden-Harris Administration launched an ambitious whole-of-government agenda centered on advancing racial equity, supporting underserved communities, and redressing systemic racism in policies, laws, and programs. As part of this work, the Biden-Harris Administration is taking steps to narrow the racial wealth gap, including an aggressive effort to combat racial discrimination in housing and support home ownership, and President Biden has directed Federal agencies to increase the share of funds the government spends with small, disadvantaged businesses, including those owned by Black and Brown Americans, by 50%.
- Supporting Gender Equity and Equality. In a first of its kind initiative, the Biden-Harris Administration has established within the Executive Office of the President a White House Gender Policy Council (GPC) staffed by domestic and global gender policy experts. Members of the GPC work in coordination with other White House policy councils and across all federal agencies to instill a strategic, whole-of-government approach to gender equality and gender equity, with particular attention paid to the barriers faced by women and girls.
- Accelerating LGBTQ+ Equality. The Biden-Harris Administration has taken historic actions to accelerate the march toward full LGBTQ+ equality. These include issuing Executive Orders to advance a government-wide effort to prevent and combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and to enabling all qualified Americans – including transgender Americans – to serve their country in uniform.
- Promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. In June, President Biden established a government-wide initiative to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in all parts of the Federal workforce. This Executive Order reaffirms that the United States is at its strongest and most effective when our Nation’s public servants reflect the full diversity of the American people. As part of this effort, President Biden charged Federal agencies with taking an ambitious, systematic approach to embedding DEIA in Federal hiring and employment practices by reviewing whether members of underserved communities face barriers to employment, promotion, or professional development, as well as advancing pay equity, promoting safe workplaces free from harassment, and expanding inclusive training.