

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

FONDEMOS' VIEW

"Democracy is powered by the will of the people: by their voices, their choices, and their participation." (António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Of course we could not agree more, and there is nothing wrong with restating the obvious. Still, 15 September comes round every year, and so do the sentences. What is needed now is to move from voice to action,

for the situation is getting worse year after year, as three facts from the past month, chosen among many others, remind us:

Hong Kong, 11 September. Lee Cheuk-yan, Chow Hang-tung and Albert Ho, held since 2021, were sentenced to between five and seven years in prison for *"incitement to subversion"*. Their offence was having organised the 4 June vigils, during which tens of thousands of people gathered in Victoria Park with candles to mark the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.

Nicaragua, 1 September. The National Assembly approved unanimously, by a show of hands, a constitutional reform barring from elections anyone accused of *"coup-mongering acts," "treason against the homeland,"* or of calling for *"foreign military intervention"*, while legislative elections have already been pushed back to November 2027.

Zambia, also 1 September. Hakainde Hichilema was sworn in for a second term with an official 60.5% of the vote. His main challenger, Brian Mundubile, who came second, is being held in Mukobeko maximum security prison, charged with treason. In 2017, Hichilema himself spent eighteen weeks in detention on that same charge, and had then vowed never to use it.

With such a track record, it is not the outcomes we should deplore, but our own methods that need questioning:



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We should fund for the long term. An election takes a day; building the conditions for it takes years, and that is what funding should follow.

We should fund the true pillars of democracy, i.e. a resilient and organised civil society, a press that holds accountable, a judiciary that is not under influence.

We should listen to the people on the frontline, for they set the strategy whereas our job is mostly to resource it: we will never know better than they do what is possible on their street, in their country.

At the end of the day, it's about the Mozambicans who counted their dead after counting their votes, the Chadians who were sold a transition, the Guineans who watched a timetable close, the Burmese who have held out since 2021 against the military junta, the Iranian women and men who pay for every gesture of freedom, etc.

They do not need to be reminded that democracy is powered by the will of the people, but they do need means, training, protection, political allies who will carry their case, and partners who are still there when the story has left the front page.