

The annual [Athens Democracy Forum](#) was held on 13-17 September 2017, organized for the fifth year by The New York Times in cooperation with the UN Democracy Fund and Athens City Hall. This year's programme included discussions on the future of polling, political discourse in the post-truth era, bridging the generational gap, the power of the political cartoonist, and progress towards the Global Sustainable Development Goals.

Speakers included former UN Secretary General Kofi A. Annan, who delivered the [Aristotle Lecture](#), at the Presidential Mansion, where he referenced UNDEF's role in supporting grassroots democracy; President of Greece Prokopios Pavlopoulos; Foreign Minister of Sweden Margot Wallström; Mayor of Athens Georgios Kaminis; former Prime Minister of Spain Felipe González, who was awarded the City of Athens Democracy Award; New York Times CEO Mark Thompson; New York Times writers Roger Cohen, Steven Erlanger, James Bennet; editorial cartoonist Patrick Chappatte; and UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, whose remarks can be read [here](#).

Sessions were held at the Zappeion in the National Gardens of Athens; the Stoa of Attalos in the Ancient Agora of Athens – the very birthplace of democracy; and Costa Navarino, a sustainable destination in Messinia, southwest Peloponnese. Themes at this year's Forum included

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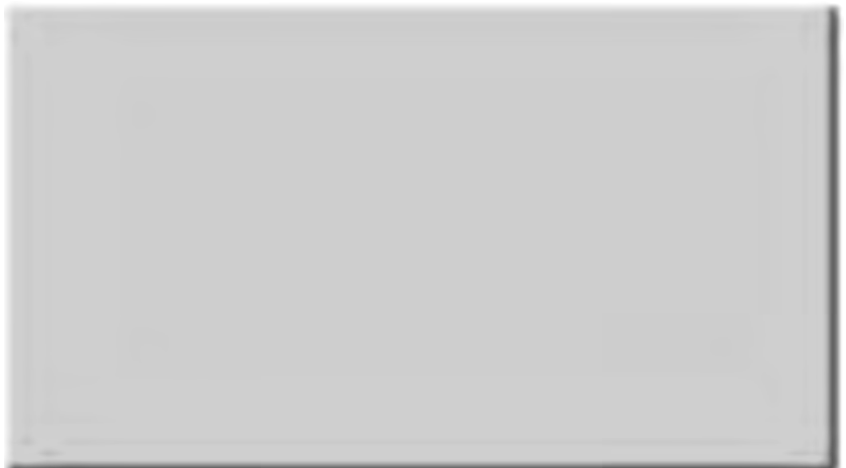
## Young people for better governance in Jordan and Lebanon

Over the last several years the influx of Syrian refugees into neighbouring states Jordan and Lebanon has led to significant challenges including in providing basic services, particularly for young people. An ongoing UNDEF-funded project in these two countries aims to address some of these challenges by increasing the civic engagement of young people – from both the host country communities and refugees – so as to ensure that public service delivery is more relevant and responsive.

The project is led by [Act on Aid Arab Regional Initiative](#) and its activities are designed to enhance governance and non-sustainable development.

The project focuses on more than 300 young people and their families in Jordan and Lebanon.

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## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Empowering young Belarusians living with disabilities

An UNDEF-funded project recently organized an international forum on the empowerment of people with disabilities titled "Available work and employment for people with disabilities". The forum took place in May and was implemented by the Belarussian charitable public association "[World Without Borders](#)." The project seeks to empower young people with disabilities through the creation of opportunities for work and employment, so as to improve their quality of life and encourage them to participate in the society.

More than 250 people including scientists and representatives of authorities from five countries – Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova - attended the forum, which took place in Vitebsk, Belarus. The two-day event covered four thematic sessions on social entrepreneurship and self-employment, professional and vocational training, the role of social services and legal regulations to implement the rights of people with disabilities to work.

In addition to the international forum, the project involves the opening and operation of a support centre for entrepreneurial activity and employment of young people with disabilities in Belarus.

### Democracy and peace: UNDEF brainstorms with its beneficiaries in Colombia

On 12 June, UNDEF organised a roundtable for current and past grantees at the UNDP office in Bogotá. The event provided a valuable opportunity to update on project implementation, exchange lessons learned, and establish new contacts. To date, UNDEF has funded eight projects in Colombia. Participants came from Corporación Opción Legal, Fundación Compartir – Todos por la Educación, Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, Cooperación Centro de Apoyo Popular and Grupo Promotor Reforma Política. There was general agreement that UNDEF support had provided the opportunity for the organisations to grow and work in new areas.

This has raised the credibility of the NGO and allowed various disparate voices to unite. The Todos por la Educación project which aims at improving the advocacy skills of young citizens, in order to promote actions towards addressing inequalities in education has become the main civil society voice on education issues with a strong network of young volunteers across the country.

Emmanuel Vargas from Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, recipient of two UNDEF grants working on freedom of expression issues highlighted that the seed funding from UNDEF had allowed the organisation to expand and learn rapidly, moving from three people to a more established and well-recognised organisation both within the country and abroad. Furthermore, through policy work and research conducted throughout project implementation, a network of academics and experts on the issue had been built up.

UNDEF flexibility was particularly welcomed especially in view of the changing political climate. Current grantee \_\_\_\_\_

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Fighting for LGBT rights in Bolivia

A documentary on Bolivian transgender rights was recently screened in La Paz at the forum “Progress and Challenges relating to the human rights of the LGBT community”. The documentary was produced as part of the UNDEF funded project “Building an Inclusive Democracy through Knowledge-building and Dialogue on LGBT rights”. Implemented by the NGO, [Coordinadora de la Mujer](#), the project goal is to enhance the leadership and advocacy skills of the Bolivian LGBT community and develop a political agenda to include LGBT rights in Bolivian law.

The screening was attended by civil society organizations, social movements and state authorities in La Paz. Entitled “Nacer” (literally meaning “Born Again”), this documentary describes the background to the Gender Identity Law in Bolivia. Stories are told through the voices of advocates for this law who describe the challenges they faced lobbying for the law and describe how it was finally enacted as the Gender Identity Law 807 in May 2016. The law protects transgender people’s right to legally change their genders.

The documentary can be viewed on this [link](#).

### TimeBank: Sharing knowledge and skills among communities of Ecuador

An UNDEF funded project in Ecuador seeks to overcome lack of community engagement through creating platforms for citizens to build solidarity in their communities and to promote active participation in the daily life of Quito. Limited social participation and lack of community cohesion remain challenges to Ecuadorian democracy. According to a 2013 survey, more than 80 percent of the inhabitants of capital city Quito had never participated in local community meetings or been a member of any type of community organization. The platform [Time Bank](#) developed under the project serves as a knowledge-sharing space for civil society and citizens in Quito to create dialogue. They are encouraged to exchange their skills and knowledge by offering or requesting various types of training courses via the Time Bank platform. In addition to training citizens to better use this platform, the NGO collaborates with local agencies in holding regular meetings and workshops in the neighborhoods, aiming to increase dialogue, promote voluntary

# UNDEF in the NEWS

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