

Summary of JCIE Webinar on “Enhancing Democratic Partnership in Asia”

Japan Center for International Exchange

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In Asia, the significant backsliding of democracy is notable since 2013; and further deterioration lately in Hong Kong, Myanmar, Afghanistan and the restrictions by COVID-19. Civic space is narrowing and particularly worrisome is press freedom. The fact that only four ASEAN countries are invited to the Summit even in a big tent approach is such a testament. Even those invited countries are facing challenges from social and religious fragmentation, surveillance technology and powerful monopoly. However, democracy is a work in progress and CSO leaders and activists are struggling to safeguard democratic values under the difficult conditions.

No matter how powerful, no single country alone can succeed. We will make it only to promote shared values through democratic partnership both at government and civil society level. Partnership should be promoted not “against-authoritarianism” but rather as “pro-democracy”.

With non-democratic countries, we should adopt two-pronged approach. We never compromise any attempt to dilute the standards of shared values. We should state a firm position against serious violation of human rights, and demonstrate solidarity with a country which acts courageously. In parallel, we should broaden through dialogue the basis for collaboration. Multilateral approach with non-democracy will be often more effective than bilateral one.

JCIE Webinar Recommendations for the Summit for Democracy and the 2021 Year for Action

A part of decline in democracy is due to the failures in meeting the need of people in democratic countries. We have to demonstrate that democracy can deliver better, realize a more equitable and inclusive development. The system of global governance should be also more democratic.

- ① **We should enhance democratic partnership and collaborative framework for cooperation at government and CSO level: Existing regional mechanism could be reviewed to make them more effective and coordinated.** Areas for partnership will include promote inclusive development, good governance, social fabric, transparent infrastructure, anti-corruption, digital technology, pandemic, climate change.
- ② The vibrant civic space and independent media are indispensable to ensuring transparent and accountable government. **Additional mechanism should be developed to extend stronger support to CSOs and independent media in Asia.**
- ③ In view of cultural and historical diversity, **the importance of the Asian ownership cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, Japan and the ROK can play a leadership role in promoting regional democratic partnership.** The regional democracies may commit themselves to strengthen their support to democratization efforts including by CSOs and media.