

Press Release

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Democracy and equality

Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis: Statement on The UN International day for Democracy

Strasbourg, 15.09.2008 - "Democracy is about equality. There is no hierarchy in democracy. On the contrary, all voices and all votes are equally important. But we must always remember that democracy depends on knowledge and information.

Today, one of the biggest challenges to democratic institutions is the growing disinterest and disillusion of voters. It is not necessarily because people lack the will to participate, but because they do not have the skills and information to participate meaningfully. In a virtual democracy, they are virtually disenfranchised.

In a world which is changing at an ever faster pace, this lack of information has become a clear threat to the regular functioning of our political institutions. A lot of voters are lost to abstention, and even more are exploited by populist politicians. If people are not given the skills and information to deal with complex issues, they will perceive these issues as threats and will embrace simplistic messages which cater to their fears and frustrations.

One of the most important ways to counter this phenomenon is through education for democratic citizenship. That is why our programme called Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights is based on a set of educational practices and activities designed to help young people and adults to play an active part in democratic life and exercise their rights and responsibilities in society.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.