

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## Filmmakers See Democracy Through Their Own Lenses

*Winners of the 2010 Democracy Video Challenge meet Secretary Clinton*

By Louise Fenner  
Staff Writer

Washington — The Colombian winner of the Democracy Video Challenge wants to be a voice for children terrorized and exploited in armed conflict. The winner from Iran wants to show the difference between real democracy and dictatorship. The Indonesian winner wants to encourage his country to keep trying to make democracy work.

The Democracy Video Challenge asked filmmakers around the world to create short videos that complete the phrase, "Democracy is..." More than 700 people sent in videos via YouTube. An online public vote determined the six winners out of 18 finalists who had been selected by a jury of experts.

Each of the six has a vision that informs his video. The filmmaker from Ethiopia wants to reach an international audience with his message that fair play is essential to democracy. The winner from Nepal wants to show his love for his country and the power of democracy to bring people together. And the winner from Spain wants to create the conditions for a global democratic process to help tackle world problems such as climate change.

They came to Washington to receive their awards and meet Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton September 10. "We talk a lot about the need to use 21st-century diplomacy to solve 21st-century problems. Well, this is the heart of that 21st-century diplomacy — connecting directly to people, particularly young people," Clinton said.

From Washington, the winners travel to New York and Los Angeles to meet democracy activists and members of the U.S. film and television industry.

### DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Clinton quoted Iranian winner Farbod Khoshtinat, whose video *ATTN: Mr. Democrat*, was inspired by the Green Movement in Iran: "I believe if I want democracy, I should fight for it! And this is my way of fighting." His video portrays imprisonment, voter fraud, corruption, oppression. After living 20 years in Iran — most of his life — "I don't have any idea of what democracy is," Khoshtinat said in an interview. "But I do know what democracy is not, so I have to say it. I have to tell the difference between dictatorship and democracy."

The intent of the video "was to give a stage to the people," he said. Winning the award "is a great opportunity, and I'm really grateful for that, but the main mission was to say what I want to say as an artist and as an Iranian. And I did it, and I'm so glad." Khoshtinat is currently studying in Malaysia because, he said, the Iranian government told him to stop making films. (See also: "A Winning View of Democracy from Iran.")

Juan Pablo Patiño Arevalo's video, *Democracy is the right of life*, is a fragment of his documentary *Osos Abandonados* (Lost Innocence), about war children in his native Colombia. "The children need a voice," he said. "I believe that art is a powerful tool to give a message and also to give voice to those that some people are turning invisible."

The video shows a child witnessing his mother being taken away by armed men, and it argues that democracy is the right to live without fear. Asked what he hopes viewers will take away from his film, he said, "I want people to think we are not alone in the world and there are other people that need help from us. If we can help in some way to make their life better, we have to do it."

Joel Marsden has traveled to 26 countries from his base in Spain to build support for a global referendum that would use the Internet, mobile phones, national voting infrastructures and satellite voting machines to give every person on the planet the opportunity to vote on issues such as climate change, international security, poverty reduction and human rights. His team built a voting machine that uses GPS and satellite technology and has successfully been tested in places where there is no Internet connectivity, Marsden said. He made a feature film, *World Vote Now*, which was the basis for his two-and-a-half-minute video for the Democracy Video Challenge (DVC).

The DVC prize "is an incredible honor," he said. "I feel like I'm representing all those people from the countries I've worked with who are hoping for a more equal and just world." Asked if he thinks global democracy is possible, Marsden answered, "I don't think it — I know it."

### CREATIVE VISIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Yared Shumete of Ethiopia said winning the Democracy Video Challenge has motivated him to make more films. "I want to continue editing and directing, but especially I want to make a movie that can touch an international audience," he said. His video, titled *Democracy is Fair Play*, shows two boys playing a popular game in which the loser of a rock-throwing contest has to carry the winner on his back. In a webchat earlier this year, Shumete said, "Children instinctively know the unwritten rules of

democracy, which is based on their moral sensibility.”

In Ethiopia, Shumete and fellow filmmakers founded the Alatinos Filmmakers Association, which works to improve the conditions for filmmaking in the country. “I know how we are making movies in Ethiopia, so I want to see how Americans, how the Hollywood filmmakers make movies,” he said. “I’m really excited to see on location how they work with the camera and actors and everything on the set.”

Adhyatmika wants to be “a really good cultural ambassador for Indonesia, so I could show Secretary Clinton and the people of America that Indonesia actually has done many good things in terms of democracy.”

His film, *Democracy is yet to learn*, is a satirical comedy about democratic life in Indonesia. It is set in a schoolroom and the “students” are representatives of Indonesian society, such as farmers, engineers and politicians, who have little idea what the word democracy means; only a schoolboy seems to know the answer.

Building a democracy “is a process of learning,” he said. “And [the film] has another metaphor, that the future of democracy – the future of everything, actually – belongs to the youth.”

Another creative vision is seen in Anup Poudel’s video *Democracy Is Black*, in which liquids colored blue, yellow, green and red – representing freedom, unity, peace and love – are poured together. The colors also represent Poudel’s father, brother, sister and mother. The resulting liquid is black. “Black is not negative, black is power; it’s a positive,” Poudel said. “Black is the color of power, and democracy is the power of nation.”

Poudel was asked how it felt to win the Democracy Video Challenge and meet Secretary Clinton. “I’m from Nepal, the country of Mount Everest,” he said, “and today I feel like I’m on the peak of Mount Everest!”

### **U.S. Forest Service Working to Support Central Asian Biodiversity**

*Activities aim to improve natural resource management*

By Domenick DiPasquale  
Staff Writer

Washington – The five nations of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – encompass an array of ecosystems rich in biodiversity amidst landscapes ranging from arid desert to mountainous forests.

Such natural resources now are in danger, however, from a variety of human and natural threats, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) officials say. Arable agricultural and grazing land

has suffered degradation that may undermine the economic viability of rural areas. Already insufficient water supplies become even scarcer as a result of climate change. Illegal and unsustainable logging for timber and firewood has caused significant deforestation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with man-made fires adding to the loss of valuable forest resources. Central Asian forests are also under pressure from invasive species.

In response, the USFS, in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), earlier this year conducted a biodiversity assessment of Central Asia to identify major threats to the region’s ecosystems, study the impact of global climate change on its biodiversity and suggest areas where natural resource management can be incorporated into U.S. foreign assistance activities for the region.

“The assessment examined how biodiversity feeds into other issues such as economic development, food security and water management, in addition to environmental issues themselves,” said Brad Kinder, a USFS program specialist who helped conduct the assessment.

In an interview with *America.gov*, Kinder explained some of the pressing environmental challenges currently facing the nations of Central Asia. One such historical problem in the region, he said, has been land degradation, an issue going back as far as the Soviet Union’s “virgin lands” project of the 1950s, which attempted to transform vast expanses of Kazakhstan’s steppes for grain production. He also cited the Soviet-era diversion of water from the Aral Sea for agricultural irrigation. More recently, increased livestock production, combined with the failure to rotate herds among pastures, has led to overgrazing that has diminished soil fertility. Forest management likewise is an issue, as substantial deforestation already has occurred in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

“All of Central Asia has low forest coverage, but these forests are unique because of their biodiversity,” Kinder said. “Many domesticated species of fruits and nuts are thought to have originated there.” The wild ancestor of the apple, for example, is native to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and walnut forests are found throughout the region, to name but two of the more than 300 species of fruits and nuts found in the region.

Although the region has many committed individuals skilled in natural resource management, Kinder said, the Central Asian nations often lack the technical capacity and financial resources to effectively carry out programs in this field. Issues such as job creation and economic development that have a direct effect on human populations are seen as more pressing needs that take precedence.

Kinder and one other USFS staff member conducted the regionwide biodiversity assessment in March 2010, working out of Almaty, Kazakhstan, but also traveling to Kyrgyzstan. Over the course of four weeks, they reviewed existing research, visited several field sites and protected areas and met officials from government agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in both nations. The finished assessment is now under review by USAID, and will serve as a means to identify possible areas of engagement by that agency on natural resource management and conservation in Central Asia.

The biodiversity assessment is but one aspect of USFS involvement with the region. An official from the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia, a local NGO based in Kazakhstan but active in all five nations, attended a USFS seminar on watershed management held this April in Arizona. The following month, an official from this and one other regionwide NGO, the Kyrgyzstan-based Central Asian Mountain Partnership, went to a similar seminar on climate change and natural resource management held in California.

In October, Kinder and two other USFS officials will participate in a workshop in Almaty that will focus on watershed management and establishment of market-based systems to better manage natural resources and biodiversity.

The USFS also has been working with Kazakhstan in the areas of private forestry and fire management. Four people from that nation's Committee of Forestry and Hunting who are involved with a World Bank program on forest restoration in Kazakhstan went to Colorado's Rocky Mountains this August to examine the U.S. approach to these issues. Among the highlights of the delegation's trip was a visit to a USFS firefighting crew and helicopter squad at Pike National Forest, site of a massive 2002 wildfire. The Kazakhstani delegation expressed interest in collaborating with the USFS to develop a fire behavior model for their own country.

Such international cooperation brings benefits beyond the practical and technical, important as those are. Kinder, who served in Kazakhstan with the Peace Corps from 1999 to 2001 as an environmental educator and whose wife is from that country, pointed to the value of the cross-cultural communication that arises from such partnerships.

"I love bringing individuals from the domestic side of the U.S. Forest Service to a foreign country for them to observe their culture and experience their hospitality," he said. "Creating such connections is extremely fulfilling."

## International Bank Regulators Impose Financial Reforms

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — Leading international bank regulators have agreed on new, wide-ranging rules that would require banks to hold more ready capital and take fewer risks. The reforms are part of an effort to make the global banking system safer while also protecting national economies from future financial crises.

"These capital reforms, together with the introduction of a global liquidity standard, deliver on the core of the global financial reform agenda," the members of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision announced September 12 at a meeting in Switzerland. The financial regulatory reforms will have to be ratified by the Group of 20 (G20) advanced economies when it meets November 11-12 in Seoul, South Korea. U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Benjamin Bernanke is one of the 27 central bankers who make up the Basel Committee.

The heart of the new regulations would require banks to hold 7 percent of their assets in a reserve fund as a safeguard against major financial crises like the most recent worldwide economic recession, which is regarded as the most serious since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The current level for losses set by the Basel Committee is 2 percent. The expanded requirement would be phased into effect by January 1, 2018, in part to give financial institutions time to adapt and absorb the new requirements.

The new requirements include measures designed to safeguard against risks that could put banks in jeopardy. The start of the phase-in of the new rules, which are being called Basel III, is January 1, 2013.

"The agreements reached today are a fundamental strengthening of global capital standards," said Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the European Central Bank and chairman of the Basel Committee's Group of Governors and Heads of Supervision.

"Their contribution to long-term financial stability and growth will be substantial. The transition arrangements will enable banks to meet the new standards while supporting the economic recovery," Trichet added.

Nout Wellink, chairman of the Basel Committee and president of the Netherlands Bank, said that this combination of stronger capital requirements and new capital buffers will ensure that banks are better able to withstand economic and financial stress and support economic growth.

One of the factors identified by the G20 at summits last year in London and Pittsburgh was that banks had been undercapitalized when the most recent crisis erupted in December 2007. One of the other factors the G20 nations identified was excessive risk-taking, especially in the United States, where banks and mortgage lenders were using subprime mortgages.

The Federal Reserve Bank, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency – the three top U.S. banking regulators – issued a joint statement September 12 from Washington saying they supported the Basel Committee efforts to increase the quality, quantity and international consistency of capital, strengthen liquidity standards, discourage excessive risk-taking and reduce wide fluctuations in regulatory requirements.

“The agreement represents a significant step forward in reducing the incidence and severity of future financial crises, providing for a more stable banking system that is less prone to excessive risk-taking, and better able to absorb losses while continuing to perform its essential function of providing credit to creditworthy households and businesses,” the statement said.

“Today’s agreement represents a significant strengthening in prudential standards for large and internationally active banks,” they added.

#### OBAMA CALLED FOR REGULATORY REFORMS

In 2009, President Obama called on the nation’s financial industry to work with him and Congress in crafting a new regulatory system to prevent a future economic catastrophe similar to the current crisis.

During a speech in New York September 14, 2009, Obama said that there was growing stability appearing in the U.S. economy and it was beginning to return to normal as a result of interventions by the federal government in the marketplace. But he warned the financial sector that “normalcy cannot lead to complacency.”

Most economists believe the recession that began in December 2007 effectively bottomed out in the summer of 2009 and a gradual recovery has been under way since.

Obama chose to address the financial sector from Wall Street about the risks of allowing the nation to again conduct business without regard for the consequences of a marketplace under-regulated and with inadequate oversight from the federal government. His comments came one year after the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history, when the investment company Lehman Brothers collapsed. That bankruptcy set off a string of managed mergers to prevent further failures and to avert the

possible collapse of the U.S. financial system.

“We will not go back to the days of reckless behavior and unchecked excess that was at the heart of this crisis, where too many were motivated only by the appetite for quick kills and bloated bonuses,” Obama said in 2009. “Those on Wall Street cannot resume taking risks without regard for consequences, and expect that next time, American taxpayers will be there to break their fall.”

Global financial reform and international regulation were key issues at the 2009 Pittsburgh G20 Summit. Obama sought to assure world leaders that the United States was seeking to prevent recklessness and weaknesses in its financial sector.

Obama told other world leaders that his administration was working with Congress on the most ambitious overhaul of the financial regulatory system since the 1930s. On July 21, 2010, Obama signed the sweeping financial regulatory legislation into law.

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