

## **The Donostia Declaration on Modern Direct Democracy**

At an anxious and divided time in a world where many have grown distant from democracy and each other, we have come together.

We gathered this week in the city of Donostia-San Sebastian to share experiences, knowledge and ideas with people who are very different from us but share a passion for democracy and participation.

We come from more than 120 cities, from 30 countries, from six continents. We are Donostians. We are Basques. We are Spaniards. We are Europeans. We are Asians. We are from the Americas, Africa and the Pacific. We come from every corner of the globe, and from all walks of life. Among us are scholars, trade unionists, journalists, environmentalists, feminists, activists, campaign organizers, philanthropists, elected officials, appointed officials, local officials, NGO leaders, lawyers, businesspeople, farmers, students, citizens, engineers, and the unemployed.

We have met over three days and four nights in the Miramar Palace and in the City Hall of Donostia-San Sebastian to discuss direct and participatory democracy at an open forum to which the entire world was invited.

We were inspired by the setting—the beautiful city and its bay—and by the commitment of the people here to local democracy and autonomy through many decades and difficulties. Many of us see ourselves in their struggle for self-determination.

We met in the Basque Country near the end of the longest and busiest year in the democratic history of earth. More people cast votes this year than ever before. The people of the world have never been more closely tied together, and yet government has never seemed further away from the people. Too many of our representative democracies are failing. And even where they succeed, they are not enough. Democracy is not just politics. Voting is only one piece of democracy. And choosing representatives is but one small part of participation.

We believe that building a culture of democratic participation that includes everyone — both in legal rights and practice — is a great challenge in all contexts and at every level. We need new platforms and new infrastructure and new media models and new thinking and perhaps even a new “democratic psyche” that put people power behind participation, both in the real and the virtual worlds.

And we celebrate and support how social movements do the essential work of democracy, linking the local and the global to make our communities more democratic and resilient and to make our world a better, safer place to live. We have many differences of opinion about the many particulars of building participation, but on one point, we agree:

Our democracies must be democratized. And we hereby commit ourselves to fighting for this democratization.

While we see deliberation as vital to democracy, we do not have all the time in the world. The character and technologies of participation are changing, especially in our cities. And we are impatient to make more changes and improvements. That’s why we need to foster greater education and create more capacity for people to learn how to participate more democratically and effectively. And it’s why we want to create, contribute to and engage in new forms of communication at all levels of our political lives.

We want to make clear: our representative democracies need to become much more direct now, by allowing citizens to become authors of direct legislation, agenda-settings and decision-makers. Initiative and referendum rights must be incorporated in all political jurisdictions via rules that are decided by the people themselves, and do not impede their use by the citizens. Such rules must be well-designed and balanced to make our representative democracies truly representative.

This document is itself a product of democratic conversation, and it does not reflect the precise opinions of all of us; we issue it with great respect for those who disagree.

We offer this statement, the Donostia Declaration, on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of November 2016. And we welcome the suggestions, corrections, and contributions of people everywhere.