



# Building blocks of democracy

## Citizen participation:

Participation is the key role for citizens in democracy. It is not just a right, it is a duty. Participation may take many forms, including standing for election, voting in elections, becoming informed, debating issues, attending meetings, paying taxes – even protesting!

## Regular free and fair elections:

Elections are the way that representatives are chosen in a democratic society. For a society to remain democratic, it is important that elections be held regularly. It is also important that elections be free and fair – this means that citizens of voting age should have the right to stand for government, that there should be no intimidation, corruption or threats involved in elections, and that there shouldn't be obstacles that make it difficult for people to vote.

## Accountability:

In a democracy, leaders are elected by the citizens to represent them. These representatives have a responsibility to answer to the citizens whom they represent.

It is also important to recognize that elected representatives, in any sphere of government, don't represent only those who voted for them, but the whole community, province or nation. Their responsibility is to make sure that decisions that are taken are in the best interest of the whole electorate.

## Choice:

In order to truly give people a say in who governs their country, there must be a choice. Different parties and candidates allows for opposition to the party that wins the elections. This helps provide the government with different viewpoints on issues.

## The rule of law:

In a democracy, everybody must obey the law, and be held accountable if they break the law – even the President! Democracy also requires that the law be applied fairly, equally and consistently.

## Basic human rights:

Human rights are those things that human beings need to develop to their full potential, and to be able to live in peace. Democracy is one of a number of human rights. Others include the right to freedom of expression, to equality and to education. To be truly democratic, a country must strive to respect and protect the human rights of all its citizens

## Equality before the law:

Equality means that all people are valued equally, and are not discriminated against on the basis of their race, their gender, their ethnic group or any other characteristic. Democratic societies emphasise that all people are equal, while allowing people to have different cultures, beliefs, etc.

## Transparency:

Elected representatives and officials should carry out the business of governing in a way that is open and in which citizens are able to see what work they are doing and how it is being done. This makes it possible for people to hold them accountable.

## Economic freedom:

In a democracy, the government must allow for some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose the kind of work they want to do, and to join labour unions. These are expressions of economic freedom.

## Control of the abuse of power:

Democratic societies work to prevent any elected official or group of people in power from abusing the power they have been given by the people.

## Political tolerance:

While the wishes of the majority in a democracy decides who will rule the country, the rights of the minority must be protected. Minority parties must be allowed to organize themselves and to speak out on issues. In a democracy, individual citizens must also learn to be tolerant of one another.