

## **Statement of James A. Baker, III**

Members of the Forum, and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, the world is confronted by challenges of seismic proportions. A war in Ukraine poses the biggest military threat to the security of that continent since the end of World War 2. Inflation and supply chain problems are creating economic woes as people around the globe continue to cope with the aftermath of the biggest pandemic in a century. And we face the difficult challenge of addressing global climate change while also maintaining a steady flow of reliable energy—a dilemma that could be particularly vexing in parts of Europe this winter.

But perhaps most perplexing of all, too many democracies are facing serious threats of backsliding towards authoritarianism for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although the number of democracies around the globe grew from 70 at the beginning of that year to a high of 119 in 2019, more and more democracies are on shaky ground today as the international balance is shifting in favor of tyranny. This confounding phenomenon is occurring as China emerges as perhaps one of the most powerful authoritarian states in world history and as Russia threatens stability in Europe.

Confronted with such challenges, we must remember that freedom works. First and foremost, freedom allows citizens the freedom to speak their own minds, choose their own leaders, and worship in their own ways. But there is another important benefit of freedom. Armed with it, democracy empowers citizens to bring about change through participation and to persuade their leaders to act for the greater good.

And so, I want to thank the World Forum for Democracy for establishing this platform to bolster democracy and make it even stronger. The goal is to build a world that is a safer and more prosperous place for all of us. Democracy plays a key role in accomplishing that goal because democratic nations—that is, nations with a respect for human dignity and the rule of law—tend to resolve conflict peacefully rather than with force.

Thank you,  
James A. Baker, III  
61<sup>st</sup> U.S. Secretary of State