Charta 25

Preamble

We speak now because silence is no longer an option. Authoritarian populists no longer operate at the margins; they sit in government across the world. Their presence is normalised, their rhetoric echoed in institutions that once guarded democracy. What once seemed unthinkable is now routine. The line between democracy and its imitation is being blurred in real time, and we are told to accept this as normal. We won't! This Charter speaks with the clarity of those who have grown up watching freedoms recede and justice erode. We do not speak from nostalgia, but from a place deeper: this is our future being stolen, and we refuse to be its silent heirs!

We, the undersigned, speak not on behalf of any political party, state, or ideology, but as citizens of conscience compelled to respond to the profound democratic unravelling of our time. Across the world, we witness a surge of authoritarianism that threatens to undo the hard-won principles of human dignity, civic freedom, and pluralism.

This crisis is not distant, nor abstract. It unfolds in parliaments and courtrooms, on screens and in schools, in the daily lives of those whose voices are ignored and whose rights are eroded. We declare that the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, to which all our governments are bound, are not being upheld. Those charged with defending these values - governments, parties, and institutions - have too often failed: through silence, complicity, or opportunism.

Inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, hereafter abbreviated as UDHR, the moral clarity of Charta 77 and the democratic ideals reaffirmed in the IYC25 Conference Report, we also draw from the insights of the IYTT Youth Panel. This panel is a diverse assembly of over 200 young people from 50 countries, united by a strong interest in the development of openness and democracy. Where many barometers capture public opinion, the IYTT Youth Panel examines deeper: political ideas, principles, and the legitimacy of prevailing power structures. It offers a rare opportunity to probe the minds of the emerging informed citizenry - young people who do not merely react to politics but challenge its assumptions and reimagine its future.

We write to reaffirm the simple but radical idea that democracy must be people-centered: power must reside with all, not in the unbounded hands of a few. As the IYC25 Conference reminds us, we are not willed by

someone pitting us against each other as contentious groups, but by our own individual choice to be communal and to govern together. To oppose authoritarians, we need engaged citizens who act on the democratic ideals of dignity, equity, pluralism, freedom of expression, and shared responsibility.

1. **Democracy is not a given**

Democracy is not a natural state. It is a fragile construct that must be consciously preserved and actively lived. Too many regimes invoke democratic legitimacy while violating its core: the equal right of all to take part in public affairs (UDHR Article 21.1). We reaffirm that democracy must be fought for, lived, and defended (UDHR Preamble).

2. **Authoritarianism is a symptom, not a cause**

Authoritarianism is not born of strength, but of unhealed wounds: economic despair, betrayal by institutions, broken promises, dislocated identities. It thrives where participation is denied (UDHR Article 21.2) and speech is manipulated (UDHR Article 19). It grows in the absence of justice (UDHR Article 8) and belonging (UDHR Article 28).

3. **This is not just an authoritarian surge**

The authoritarian wave is often disguised as a right-wing revival, but it is driven by a deeper crisis: the inability of liberal democracies to uphold social protections (UDHR Article 22) and human dignity (UDHR Article 1). When democracies fail to secure basic rights, including the right to security (UDHR Article 3) and social protection, reactionary forces move in to fill the void.

4. **Populism forges false identities**

Authoritarian populists do not offer political inclusion; they manufacture a mythical “people” based on exclusion. Their identity is forged not in solidarity, but in resentment. They crown leaders, not principles. Their movements demand loyalty, not dialogue, undermining freedom of association and participation (UDHR Articles 20.1, 21.1).

5. **Populism weaponises emotion to spark division**

Authoritarian movements feed off fear and anger. They distort information (UDHR Article 19), amplify outrage, and create digital tribes that substitute slogans for understanding. In their world, truth is secondary to loyalty, and education becomes a threat to obedience (UDHR Article 26.2).

6. **Political parties must regain trust**

Citizens lose faith when parties promise transformation but deliver compromise. When politics is seen as a game of elites, people seek alternatives, however dangerous. We call on political parties to communicate honestly, act transparently, and serve the public with integrity (UDHR Articles 21.3, 29.2).

7. **Institutions must reflect the people**

Institutions built to uphold justice now often obscure it. Bureaucratic complexity, corruption, and bias have alienated those they should serve. We reject a democracy that shields privilege. Public institutions must be transparent, inclusive, and accountable to the people (UDHR Articles 6, 7, 8, 10, 21.3).

8. **We reject a democracy of exclusion**

A system that tolerates exclusion of women, minorities, dissenters is not a democracy. We reject the misuse of nationalism, traditionalism, and cultural identity to justify oppression. Democracy is not preserved by enforcing sameness but by protecting difference (UDHR Articles 1, 2, 16.1, 21.1).

9. **We stand for equal worth and shared agency**

Every human being has equal worth and the right to shape the conditions of their life (UDHR Article 1). Democracy is not merely voting; it is a shared agency. We oppose systems that strip individuals of their freedom in the name of control or tradition (UDHR Articles 3, 29.1).

10. **We embrace dialogue and reject violence**

Democracy thrives in conflict mediated by dialogue, not in forced consensus or coercion. We reject violence (UDHR Article 3), censorship (UDHR Article 19), and ideological conformity. True democracy makes space for difference, confrontation, conversation, and growth (UDHR Article 20.1).

11. **Knowledge must serve emancipation**

Education is not a privilege but a right. Knowledge must liberate, not dominate. It must equip citizens to question power, understand complexity, and participate fully in public life. A democratic society invests in informed agency, not passive obedience (UDHR Articles 26.1, 26.2).

12. **We reject the domination of democracy by capital**

Authoritarian movements are backed by concentrated wealth. Vast financial networks fund propaganda, shape media, and manipulate public opinion. Economic inequality becomes political inequality. We reject a

democracy bought by money and demand that power be accountable to all (UDHR Articles 7, 21.2, 22, 23.1).

The plea

Let this Charta stand as a testimony. We do not accept the slow decay of democracy. We do not accept fear, division, or silence. Charta 25 does not offer a program. It offers a plea: that we confront, without illusions, the forces dismantling democratic life and that we reclaim, without fear, the moral obligations of free citizens. Only together, in shared dignity and collective resolve, can we preserve the freedom we have inherited - and ensure it endures.

We affirm the possibility of a politics rooted not in force, but in compassion. Not in exclusion, but in dignity. Not in despair, but in solidarity. The future will not be written by authoritarians, unless we let them write it alone.

Signatories (to become one click here)

Alice Smith, United Kingdom

Alina Koch, Germany

Ambrose Ngobi, Uganda

Andrea Olmi, Italy

Angela Khumalo, South Africa

Anh Vu, Germany

Ani Melikyan, Armenia

Anita Sammarini, Italy

Anna Pietri, Greece

Benedikt Schuegraf, Germany

Benjamin Galbraith, United Kingdom & France

Bethany Dennis, United Kingdom

Brenald Dzonzi, Malawi

Carmen Engelhardt, Germany

Claudia Pintore, Italy

Constança Pagès, Spain

Dania Vanessa Verbena Flores, Guatemala

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Victoria Portnaya, Ukraine

Vivek Venkatram, Singapore

Zanoxolo Mciteka, South Africa

Every human being on this planet is welcome to be a signatory.

Follow this link to become part of the movement and sign the Charta 25.

Your name and nationality/country of origin will appear here:

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Patricia Angus, USA

Urban Strandberg, Sweden

Patricia Gotschalk, USA

Viola Bergquist, USA

Don Bry, USA

Jonathan Geib, Sweden

Lotta Lekvall, Sweden

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Måns Söderbom, Sweden

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