Summit for Democracy
Cohort on Elections Integrity
led by
Election Commission of India

I. INTRODUCTION

More than hundred democracies participated in the Summit for Democracy which was successful in highlighting that democracies deliver development, peace, prosperity, and security, ensure human rights and upheld the rule of law. The Summit also underscored that while the quest towards a perfect democracy is a shared pursuit of all democratic societies, it is important to recognize that democracy can take many forms.

Election is the most visible aspect of a democracy. Free and fair elections, on the other hand, determine if it is a functioning democracy or electoral autocracy. Free and fair elections are possible only when other necessary conditions are met. These include, strong democratic institutions and practices, respect for human rights, accountable governance, lack of corruption, rule of law and an independent, impartial judiciary, social structure based on the principles of inclusion, equity, and equality; and a safe environment for civil society and an independent media.

India has been a thriving and vibrant democracy. Election Commission of India (ECI) is widely credited to regularly conduct free and fair elections in a complex and challenging milieu. ECI has also engaged with other democracies, learning from and sharing best practices to conduct free and fair elections.

II. OBJECTIVE

The Cohort will undertake collaborative activities to enhance understanding of election integrity with due regard to cultural and social contexts. It is a universally recognised fact that credible elections results in accountability of leaders and officials to the public and accords legitimacy to the government. Outcome of our efforts would reflect this Cohort's understanding on three core themes in elections that could also be a useful reference for those could not participate, without being prescriptive. The Cohort would also deliberate on how to meet identified training and capacity building needs of participants. These themes include:

> **Role, framework and capacity of election management bodies**: Election management bodies should have the required legal tools and capacity to administer the process of elections impartially. This is dependent on variety of factors including a professional, neutral and transparent personnel, adequate financial resources, and constitutional provisions allowing for autonomy. Discussions here should lead participants to identify issues to strengthen the position of election management bodies within their unique context.

> **Technology in elections** : There is a growing appreciation of technological solutions in elections, actual process, improving communication, lowering operational costs, enhancing transparency, etc. There is, however, some scepticism and challenges in deployment of technology in full measures including around data management. Roll back of technology is not an option, discussions here would be to arrive at best approaches to deploy technology.

Inclusive and accessible elections: Participative elections truly reflects the mandate of people. Converting citizens into electors, and electors into informed and vigilant voters is a constant pursuit with several challenges, some unique, others universal. The focus here would be to explore approaches on widening participation in elections especially of women, disadvantaged communities and youth.

III. ACTIVITIES

Activities under the Cohort are proposed to be collaborative in nature. Participants would share their expertise and experiences as per areas of interest. It is suggested that the work of the Cohort is undertaken in three conferences. These could be in virtual/hybrid format and can be organized with a gap of 6-7 weeks.

First conference on '**Role, framework and capacity of election management bodies'** was held on 31st Oct. – 01 Nov. 2022 at New Delhi and the Second Conference on **'Use of Technology and Elections Integrity'** held on 23-24 Jan 2023 at New Delhi. The 3rd Conference on **'Inclusive Elections and Elections Integrity'** would be held in virtual format on 09th March 2023. Each Conference would culminate in an agreed upon position paper. The last conference would also be utilized to close the work of Cohort including developing an agreed upon outcome document.

IV. PARTICIPATION

Election management bodies, governments, academia, civil society, political parties, foundations are all invited to participate for truly representative discussions and collaborative actions.

V. OUTCOME

The three position papers will be converted into an agreed upon outcome document that could be adopted during the next Summit for Democracy. The outcome document shall also carry a work plan to meet identified training and capacity building needs.

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