INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED TO “STOP FIGHTING START VOTING”

Thursday 25 June, 2020

Ad campaign promotes direct democracy as a peaceful means of resolving conflict

Washington, DC (June 24, 2020) Today an international educational campaign called *Stop Fighting Start Voting* was launched to highlight the use of direct democracy as a peaceful means to resolve conflict.

“*The Stop Fighting Start Voting* campaign was launched to highlight direct democracy as a critical tool to help peacefully resolve long simmering conflicts – like those we see over Hong Kong, Catalonia, Taiwan, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka,” stated Paul Jacob, president of Citizens in Charge Foundation.

Stop Fighting Start Voting was launched by the non-profit Citizens in Charge Foundation with support from direct democracy experts and organizations from around the world – researchers, advocates, NGOs, and academics. The campaign does not advocate for or against the underlying issues in these conflicts but advances the idea that the peaceful resolution to these conflicts can be achieved through the use of direct democracy – in the form of initiatives and referendum - as long as the use is conducted under accepted international norms and procedures.

“The use of direct democracy must be exercised within internationally recognized legal frameworks so as to be recognized by the league of nations as a legitimate expression of the will of the people,” stated Daniela Bozhinova, chair of Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens Initiative.

The Stop Fighting Start Voting campaign kicked off today with a 60 second ad running globally on social digital platforms as a way to increase awareness of unresolved conflicts in Hong Kong and concerning the establishment of a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. The campaign will be creating an ongoing series of video spots to highlight conflicts
around the world that can be peacefully resolved with direct democracy.

“The world is filled with conflict. Not just fighting resulting in bloodshed but fighting with words and actions that simply increase division that will make resolution of these conflicts unlikely. *Stop Fighting Start Voting* is a campaign where experts on direct democracy are uniting and doing what they can to increase awareness of a peaceful and legitimate path to resolving these conflicts – voting using direct democracy,” stated Dane Waters, chair of the Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California.

The campaign will also increase awareness of efforts around the world to either improve or restrict the tools of direct democracy or use them in a way that is not consistent with internationally accepted norms and procedures. Direct democracy is being proposed today in both Romania and Ukraine but with rules and regulations that make its use highly unlikely, certainly out of reach of the citizens who need it most in resolving these conflicts. Additionally, there are referendums currently scheduled – for instance, in Russia - that will likely not be done within the standards to make the results of the referendum legitimate.

“We must help bring light to these issues so that the media, opinion leaders, and the people know what to look for when deciding if that specific form of direct democracy, or its use, is legitimate based on internationally accepted norms and procedures,” stated Matt Qvortrup, Professor of Political Science at Coventry University.

Stop Fighting Start Voting established an Advisory Board consisting of direct democracy experts and organizations from around the world. Here are some of their comments regarding the campaign and the importance of direct democracy.

“Democracy is a conversation that never ends. Countries with political systems that enable such conversations are doing far better than those where confrontations are permanently cultivated. Therefore, forms of modern direct democracy like citizens initiatives and popular referendums need to be designed as smart screwdrivers for a society to fix problems instead of being stupid hammers to hit on other heads. Today’s world needs more conversations and less confrontations. Stop fighting, start voting,” stated Bruno Kaufmann, co-president of the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy

"Democracy is the simple idea that the people ought to have a say in the public decisions that affect their lives. It Is the best system so far discovered to resolve conflicts peacefully and fairly. This campaign aims

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to spread the word about two of democracy's most powerful tools -- the initiative and referendum -- and how to use them to give the people a voice in important decisions," stated John Matsusaka, Charles F. Sexton Chair in American Enterprise, University of Southern California and Executive Director of Initiative and Referendum Institute, USC

“In a scenario of growing disenchantment with the transformative capacity of politics, tools of direct democracy can help to both limiting the power of representatives, holding back unpopular decisions and opening the agenda of policy-making. However, the regulation and practice of tools of direct participation must be consistent with internationally accepted norms and procedures. This is why the Stop Fighting Start Voting campaign is so important,” stated Yanina Welp, Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy.

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