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A LEAGUE OF DEMOCRATS

On an invitation issued by Shri Jayaprakash Narayan, supplemented by Shri V.M. Tarkunde on behalf of the Radical Humanist Association, a well attended meeting was held at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi on September 17, 1972, to consider the desirability of forming an association of individuals who have unshakable faith in democratic and ethical values and who are not committed to any political party.

During the discussions at the meeting it was found that there was a general consensus in favour of such an organisation being formed and in regard to its aims and objects, membership and mode of work. A drafting committee was formed at the meeting to prepare a statement on the matters generally agreed.

The Statement prepared and finalised by the drafting committee is as follows:

"While it is a matter of satisfaction that democratic institutions have survived in our country in spite of numerous hurdles during the last 25 years, it can hardly be denied that there has been a steady erosion of democratic values and ethical standards in public affairs. Democracy in consequence remains weak and unstable. While the opposition parties have always been ineffective in the country, such checks and balances as were operative inside the ruling party have virtually disappeared in recent years. The press faces a growing threat to its independence, democratic institutions are subjected to mounting pressures, and elections to various legislative bodies are being denuded of their democratic significance on account of a phenomenal increase in the expenditure of money and resort on a wide scale to coercion and other malpractices.

"Those who sincerely believe in the democratic way of life, and are not interested in mere power politics, cannot afford to remain idle and allow the country to drift along the present dangerous course. It is imperative that they take active steps for the preservation and strengthening of democracy by forming themselves into an association, the aims and objects of which should be:

- (a) to examine all the issues which arise from time to time from a purely democratic point of view, unaffected by sectional and partisan considerations, and propagate the conclusions so as to develop a strong and independent public opinion which will

- have to be heeded by those in power;
- (b) to defend civil liberties, to secure non-official control over mass media like the radio and television, and generally to act as a watchdog for the protection of democratic conventions and institutions;
 - (c) to combat social evils which impair the democratic way of life such as untouchability, casteism and communalism, corruption in public affairs, and malpractices in elections;
 - (d) to suggest democratic solutions to basic economic problems such as removal of poverty, unemployment and inequality;
 - (e) to propagate democratic views and solutions among the broad masses of the people through Hindi and other languages which the people understand;
 - (f) and generally to take all steps for the stabilisation and strengthening of democracy, without being involved in power politics.

"The association should have a loose structure and should consist of all those who have an unshakable faith in democratic values in all aspects of social life (political, economic and cultural), and who do not hold executive posts in any political party.

"The association will neither be a supporter nor an opponent of any party. It will strive to guide public opinion by propagating rational and constructive views so as to counteract demagogic and sectarian appeals.

"Any statements emanating from the association should, as a general rule, be issued under the signatures of individual members, those having special knowledge of the subjects involved and those who subscribe to the views expressed.

"The association may be called "League of Democrats," or "League of Concerned Democrats," or "League of Active Democrats," or "Partisans of Democracy."

"As a preliminary step to the formation of such an association, organising committees should be formed in all principal cities in the country, starting with Delhi. After this is done, an all India convention should be called to launch the association."