

Prepared Remarks of Christiane Amanpour, Chief International Correspondent, CNN  
2008 NDI Democracy Luncheon  
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Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I am Christiane Amanpour and I am pleased to welcome you to the annual awards luncheon of the National Democratic Institute.

Today, the purpose of this lunch is to bestow The W. Averell Harriman Award and The Madeleine K. Albright Grant. They mark the daunting paths that must be traveled by the champions of democracy:

- With the Albright Grant to the Women's League of Burma, we recognize those who are engaged on the front lines in the battle for freedom.
- And with the Harriman Award to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, we recognize those who inspire people to support that struggle and rally to it.

Both of those endeavors are critical to the success of democracy.

As some of you know, it recently was my responsibility to produce a documentary on genocide. We reported on five from the 20th Century – the Holocaust of the Jews of Europe, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, the Kurds of Iraq, Bosnia, and indeed Rwanda – and today one is Darfur, which has happened on our watch.

Those events are pertinent to the cause of democracy today. They happened because of the absence of democracy, especially the regard for human dignity on which democracy is founded. In each of those instances of mass murder, and in Darfur today, and arguably in Burma and Zimbabwe, fellow citizens were reduced to being “the other.” They were disenfranchised of their rights, they were made powerless, and they were dehumanized. As the author and survivor Jerzy Kosinski put it, “they existed only to be exterminated.”

In the face of adamant, unyielding oppressors in Burma and Zimbabwe and elsewhere, the loss of hope is understandable. Where the desire for democracy confronts the “merely” repression, and not just killing, it is tempting to say and tempting to counsel acceptance and the avoidance of “provocation.”

Yet we are here today and the point of NDI is because we cannot, we will not, sanction this kind of surrender. NDI exists not to impose one vision of governance, but to help different visions contend, with mutual respect, in peace. A quarter century of experience has demonstrated that citizen participation through vigorous political parties and free and fair elections is indispensable to democratic governance. Party officials, constitution-makers, election experts, activists, teachers – and yes, community organizers – carry forward more than the mechanics of

democracy. They embody the ethics of democracy, they believe in human dignity, and they believe in the expectation that governments can operate with openness and accountability.

So we are here today to celebrate democracy, and to rally our support for those who place their bodies and freedom and lives on the line to build it and protect democracy. We are here to say that they must and we must persevere.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, the President of NDI, Ken Wollack.

[ ... ]

I am pleased to introduce a film on The Women's League of Burma produced by NDI and AsiaWorks Television, titled, "No Women, No Hope".

It traces the martyred modern history of Burma – the popular revolt of 1988, the election of 1990 whose results were nullified by the military government, the subsequent consigning of the rightful Prime Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi, to years of house arrest, and the Saffron revolution of 2007, which is still being suppressed. In the face of one of the most Orwellian and invasive regimes in the world, the women of Burma came together to form the Women's League of Burma, an umbrella group of 12 partner organizations, including representatives of Burma's diverse ethnic groups.

As one of its leaders states in the film, "Women can make an enormous contribution to bringing about human rights, equal rights, and democracy for all nationalities in Burma." This film is a tribute to that hope.

The WLB organizes classes, recruits local activists, and trains women in democracy. It has been outspoken on behalf of women who have been systematically targeted with sexual assaults by the junta.

We hear in the film: "These are the women who refuse to be victims." The daily cost of living under Burma's military underscores the heroism of the women shown here, and the courage and vision of the Women's League of Burma in bringing their voice to the international community.

So without further adieu, here it is, "No Women, No Peace, No Hope."

[ ... ]

What a wonderful film. It is entirely appropriate that the person who will introduce Madeleine K. Albright today is Bren Simon. In so many areas where the issue has been the wellbeing and dignity of women, Mrs. Simon has led.

The head of a property-management company headquartered in Carmel, Indiana, and formerly head of an investment company, Mrs. Simon directs the Mel and Bren Simon Charitable Trust and the Max Simon Charitable Trust. She is co-founder of the Family Support Center, a 24-hour child-abuse care facility. She has supported the efforts of the Mission International Rescue Foundation to provide social and educational services to the poor women and children of the Dominican Republic. And she was the founder of Activote America, which works to ensure that all Americans have equal access to local, regional, and national political resources – especially the birthright to vote.

Three years ago, Mrs. Simon made a generous gift that now funds the Madeleine K. Albright grant. Each year, NDI uses \$25,000 for the grant award, and the rest for other projects that promote women's political participation. The Albright Award singles out innovative and courageous organizations that empower women worldwide, and also gives them the tools to accomplish their goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen, right now I give you Mrs. Bren Simon, a stalwart of NDI and a strong advocate for the cause of women in democracy.

[ ... ]

I believe all of you will agree that this has been an inspiring event.

Our thanks and admiration go to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and to Thin Thin Aung of the Women's League for Burma. To Madeleine K. Albright, for her abiding leadership, and to Ken Wollack and the staff of NDI, who worked so hard to organize this event. They labor every day in more than 60 countries to support the cause of democracy, and even more, the potential for human decency in our time.

Thank you, and good day.