



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 16, 2008

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NDI HONORS ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA; FOCUS ON STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

WASHINGTON, DC - The National Democratic Institute (NDI) honored two champions of democracy – Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Women's League of Burma – at an awards luncheon Dec. 15 hosted by NDI Chairman Madeleine K. Albright. Archbishop Tutu received the 18th W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award. The 4th annual Madeleine K. Albright grant went to the Women's League of Burma.

In her opening remarks, Secretary Albright addressed the skeptics of democracy, noting the “unforgivable historic error to sell democracy short... democracy can make both order and prosperity more likely,” she said. “At its best, it leads to the kind of stability that lasts, a stability built on laws and mutual commitments, not unilateral decrees and the stifling of dissent.”

Introducing Archbishop Tutu, Dr. Albright described his efforts as those of “a man who has been an advocate of democracy not simply as a political form, but as an expression of belief in the importance and value of every human being.” If I had no other arguments to make for democracy, she said, “I could still make an ironclad case simply by pointing to this man – and saying, ‘We have Desmond Tutu on our side.’”

A Nobel Peace Prize winner for his leadership in overcoming apartheid in South Africa, Archbishop Tutu was honored for his global efforts on behalf of democracy since the democratic transition in South Africa. This includes his advocacy for democracy in Burma and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the world's only imprisoned Nobel Laureate and the leader of Burma's democracy struggle.

Dedicating his award to the resilience of the human spirit and the people of Burma, Archbishop Tutu said, “You have already won.” To Aung San Suu Kyi, he said, “We are coming one day to your inauguration, and Burma will be free.”

Thin Thin Aung, coordinator of the Women's League of Burma's political empowerment program, accepted the Albright grant on behalf of the organization. In her remarks, Aung described the deteriorating situation in Burma under the military regime, including the recent sentencing of 200 political activists to decades in prison. “Despite these harsh consequences, I

am proud to say that women activists still dare to speak out against injustice,” said Aung. “We aspire to a Burma that is democratic, free and prosperous.”

The Women’s League is an umbrella organization of 12 women’s groups from different Burmese ethnic backgrounds. Established in 1999, the league works for women’s empowerment and increased participation by women from all spheres of Burmese society in the country’s democracy movement and the peace and national reconciliation process. A documentary, “No Women, No Peace,” which premiered at the luncheon, profiled the League and the determined efforts of its founding members.

The group will use the \$25,000 Albright grant to allow young women from Burma currently enrolled in the political empowerment program to return to their ethnic communities within Burma and along border areas. The women will conduct two-week training sessions for other emerging women leaders that will address such key concerns as health, human trafficking, political engagement and local leadership.

The event also honored the memory of NDI staff member Andi Parhamovich, who was killed in Baghdad in 2007 while riding in a convoy that came under attack. The first Andi Parhamovich Fellowship was awarded to Ferdos Majeed Mohammed Ameen of Iraq who has worked for NDI there since 2005 and was inspired by Ms. Parhamovich. Ameen’s work focuses on strengthening civil society in Iraq and encouraging the political participation of women in her country. The fellowship will be awarded each year to a young woman who is deeply involved in building and consolidating democracy in her own country. Recipients of the fellowship come to the Washington office of NDI for training and research.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide by promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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