

## **Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright as Prepared for Delivery on May 29, 2013**

### **Madeleine K. Albright Grant Luncheon**

Thank you and good afternoon, it's wonderful to be here.

Each January, normal people mark their calendars with anniversaries and birthdays; I highlight the date of NDI's annual lunch – and why not?

The cause we celebrate each year has never been more important; the stories we share are inspiring; and we are surrounded by friends, both old and new.

This lunch also gives us a chance to say "Thank you."

And I will begin by expressing gratitude to Bren Simon – for her kind words and for her leadership within NDI; Bren, you're a fantastic member of our board and, to me, a treasured friend.

Thanks also to Ambassador Hattie Babbitt, whose experience as a diplomat and advocate, especially within our hemisphere, has made her a vital contributor to NDI.

As for our president Ken Wollack and vice-president Shari Bryan, there is no better leadership team.

In a time of constant strain, they have kept us true to our mission of support for democratic institutions and values; we are grateful to them and to NDI's incredible staff and partners across the globe.

We are grateful, as well, to have had a chance a little earlier to honor the trailblazing efforts of Laura Inés López Padilla and her colleagues.

And we are delighted this afternoon to welcome from area high schools a group of future legislators, cabinet secretaries and – yes, presidents -- who have joined us to highlight the essential role that women must play in public life.

I ask those students to stand – they are from the Cesar Chavez and Friendship Charter schools; St. Timothy's; Washington International; and the National Cathedral School – thank you all for joining us today.

Finally, we are pleased to say hello again to some special members of NDI's family.

Like any institution, NDI has had good days and bad days; but the very worst was in January 2007, when NDI's own Andi Parhamovich was killed in Iraq by terrorists.

Shortly after that tragedy, we established a fellowship in Andi's name to help carry on her work.

That fellowship is given annually to an NDI partner or staff member who is engaged in strengthening democracy in her own country.

I'm happy to announce that the recipient for 2013 is Hodan Ahmed, a senior program officer in Somalia, where the democratic challenge is daunting, but the participation of women is increasing, thus providing an important platform for future progress.

I hope you will join me in saluting Ms. Ahmed, from whom we will hear more later.... and in recognizing, as well, the representatives of the Parhamovich family who are with us today, including Andi's parents Vicki and Andre, her sister Marcella, her brothers Chris and Cory, and her nieces Kayla and Abby.

This afternoon, as we meet, the principles to which NDI is dedicated are being tested.

In the words of E.J. Dionne, "There is, across much of the democratic world, an impatience bordering on exhaustion with electoral systems and political classes."

In the Middle East, newly-elected leaders are struggling to clean up the mess left behind by autocratic regimes.

Throughout Europe, the financial crisis continues to cause stress within democratic institutions.

In Germany, when citizens were asked whether they could influence national policy by voting; the percentage saying "yes" was zero.

Almost everywhere, new technology has made it simpler for the public to express anger but no easier for governments to solve problems.

This has caused some to proclaim that democracy is destined to fail – to which I can only respond with a diplomatic term of art: balderdash.

Governing in a wireless world is hard, but popular discontent is as much an issue in centralized China and autocratic Russia as it is in Italy or Greece.

And if democracy is dying, what is it that initially gave life to the Arab revolutions?

What caused the voters of Pakistan to achieve this month the first transition from one civilian regime to another in their country's history?

What, if not the idea democracy, sustained Aung San Suu Kyi and her followers for more than 20 years and is now transforming Burma from a police state into a free one?

And what, if not the desire to shape their own destinies, has caused women on every continent to become a dynamic force for democratic growth?

Whether locally or globally, forward movement most often takes place on a step-by-step basis and, in building democracy, the involvement of women is indispensable.

That's why NDI's priority, in countries from Central America to Central Asia, has been to help democratic women organize, advocate reforms, amend constitutions, run for public office, and hold leaders accountable.

Month by month, week by week, we are making a difference and so each day more women are moving into positions of authority.

This matters because we have learned that when women are empowered to make their own political and economic choices, the chains of poverty can be broken; families are strengthened; the spread of sexually-transmitted disease slows; environmental stress is reduced; and socially-constructive values are more likely to be passed down to the young.

The pessimists are wrong to predict democracy's decline, because democracy's potential has just begun to be explored.

And there is no better way to discover what free people can do than by pushing aside the barriers of discrimination that have held half the world back – and by creating space for women to participate, compete and lead.

NDI's long-time mantra is that building democracy is not an event, but a process demanding the leadership of people from all sectors of society.

That process is neither exclusively top-down, nor bottom-up; it's more like a plant rooted in the earth but fed by sun and rain from the sky.

In the same way, freedom begins at the local level, but the story of one success can have a global impact depending on how and by whom that tale is told.

It so happens that our keynote speaker this afternoon is a genius at telling stories.

Through the medium of film, she captured the drama in Liberia as women almost literally beat swords into ploughshares, mending a torn country, then setting it free.

Abigail Disney wears many hats but with a single purpose of helping women to protect their families, build their societies, and make their voices heard.

Through her films and other projects such as the Peace is Loud Initiative, the Daphne Foundation, and the Global Fund for Women, Abigail Disney is one of those rare people -- a dreamer but also a doer -- and we are delighted to have her with us today.

Please join me in welcoming our keynote speaker, the remarkable Abigail Disney.