



**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Madeleine Albright at the
Madeleine K. Albright Grant Luncheon
March 22, 2012**

As you may know from reading about events in Egypt, this has been an extraordinarily long and interesting year at NDI; and it's only March. The silver lining in any time of stress is that it provides a true measure of leadership. And I can tell you that I have never been prouder of Ken Wollack, Shari Bryan, and NDI's entire team than in the past two months.

Senator Robert Kennedy once pointed out that, if there's no one in your way, it's probably because you're not going anywhere. Well, NDI believes in movement – toward freedom, toward human rights, and toward the kind of democratic systems that deliver.

For more than a quarter century, we have acted on that belief; and this afternoon, we reaffirm our commitment.

Earlier, we honored the Women's Discussion Group from Kyrgyzstan; precisely the kind of innovative and grassroots organization that can help to make real democracy possible.

Elsewhere across the globe, more than 70 countries will be holding presidential or parliamentary elections this year; among them Burma, where the courageous Aung San Suu Kyi has re-entered the political process – and the Middle East – where a flock of newly-empowered political parties will be testing their wings.

As these and other transitions take place, the world will be watching to assess the degree of freedom, legality, and fairness with which decisions are made.

In one sense, every election will be unique in the same way that every democracy is unique. Yet some characteristics are essential to any democracy. And among these, as Melanne Vermeer so eloquently reminded us, is the active participation of women.

We know this because – when women have the power to make their own economic and social choices – the cycle of poverty can be broken, environmental awareness increases, rates of sexually-transmitted disease decline, and constructive values are more likely to be passed on to the young.

That explains why the empowerment of women has been a cornerstone of NDI programs and policy, and why we encourage people everywhere who are working to build platforms for future progress.

Here with us today is one such person: Aferdita Sylja. Ms. Sylja is a senior officer with NDI's program in the emerging democracy of Kosovo. For the next three months, she will be with us in Washington – using her time to consult with groups that can share lessons and otherwise assist in the pursuit of justice and deeper freedom in her native land. I ask you to join with me in congratulating Ms. Sylja for winning NDI's 2012 Andi Parhamovich fellowship; her selection comes after a difficult competition and speaks well of her commitment and skill.

I also ask you to join in welcoming the family of the young woman for whom this fellowship award was named. Andi Parhamovich was a courageous and deeply valued NDI staff member in Iraq who, in 2007, was killed when militants assaulted a civilian convoy in which she was riding. Each year, we pay tribute to Andi's memory by continuing her work. And this year, once again, her parents and other close relatives have honored us by their presence.

Of course, we have another special guest with us as well.

Every cause needs its champions, but it certainly helps if those champions are not only right on the issues – but also successful, charismatic and smart. This afternoon, we have an opportunity to hear from precisely that kind of champion.

After more than a decade of service in her state legislature, Debbie Wasserman Schultz was elected in 2004 as a U.S. Representative from Florida.

In just a short time, she has risen to positions of leadership within the Democratic Party. She is the first woman to be elected by the full membership of the DNC to serve as chair, and, within Congress, as chief deputy whip and vice chair of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.

Throughout her career, she has been dedicated to addressing such vital concerns as the creation of jobs, the protection of children, the fight against breast cancer, and the safety, security, and prosperity of our citizens. She is a living demonstration of why women's participation in government is vital not just to people of one gender, but to us all.

I am privileged to present to you, the Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz.