

**Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright
NDI 25th Anniversary Dinner Celebration
Washington, DC, May 10, 2010**

Thank you, Ken, and good evening to you all.

I want to begin by joining with everybody here in recognizing and honoring Nimia Vargas and the Chocó Women's network.

Their brave efforts remind us that although democratic principles are admirable in theory, it is democracy in action that transforms history and enriches lives.

Tonight, you are by now well aware – provided you have not had too much wine – that we are celebrating NDI's 25th birthday.

As chair, I am naturally proud that we have arrived at this milestone.

But I especially congratulate Ken Wollack who has been with us in one capacity or another for twenty-four of those twenty-five years, and who has guided the organization with a sure hand from infancy to maturity.

Along the way, Ken has assembled the finest national and international staff in all of civil society.

There is something about NDI that attracts people with strong minds and stout hearts.

This truth is reflected in every corner of the globe and at many of the tables in this room.

It is highlighted, as well, by the fact that, each year, the Institute awards a fellowship grant to a person striving with particular creativity or courage to support NDI's goals in a country office or partner organization.

This fellowship is given in honor of Andi Parhamovich – a deeply valued staff member who was killed three years ago in an attack on a civilian convoy in Baghdad.

Andi's parents and other family members are here with us this evening, and I am sure they share our pride in this year's recipient of the fellowship established in her name.

Eleven years ago, Sushmita Subba Manandhar began working as an office assistant in Nepal.

At the time, she had little interest in public policy.

That changed as she learned more about NDI's purposes and as she thought about how its programs might open doors for the people of her country.

Accordingly, she began working closely with Nepal's Inter-party Women's Alliance, and is here in Washington now to take advantage of the resources on women's leadership that are available in our nation's capital.

So please join me in congratulating the second recipient of the Andi Parhamovich Grant – Sushmita Subba Manandhar.

Now, I know that I don't need to spend a lot of time tonight recounting all of the contributions NDI has made and continues to make to freedom; after all, you wouldn't be here if you didn't love NDI – and if you've been around since before dinner, you've already seen the movie.

NDI matters because democracy matters – that's the truth, pure and simple.

We may need a reminder of that from time to time – because we all have a tendency to take valuable things for granted – and because of the temptation to assume that if a system of government isn't perfect, there must be a better alternative.

Democracy is not a majestic mountain range or a tiger burning bright; it is a human creation and subject, therefore, to human limitations.

But few popular inventions have accomplished as much, and few remain more vital to the quality of life on Earth.

Last century, the world experienced a major economic crisis that produced a global Depression and that pushed the world into the abyss of Holocaust, Fascism and war.

In more recent times, we also experienced a global economic crisis.

This catastrophe has caused enormous financial pain, but it has also left the world consulting peacefully about how to ease the suffering and to keep such an event from happening again.

I, for one, believe that the primary reason for that difference is the spread and strengthening of democracy.

When people have a stable and constructive outlet for their passion, they will choose the means of hope, not hate.

Last month, the citizens of Poland suffered an almost incomprehensible loss.

Their president and first lady, along with dozens of other leading officials, perished in a moment.

This led to an outpouring of grief accompanied by a national coming together – and by the orderly and lawful transition of power.

Here again – democracy at work.

The context of that terrible tragedy is also worth citing – for it centered around one of history's great lies.

For fifty years, the Soviet Union asked the world to believe that the Katyn forest massacre was perpetrated by the Nazis instead of by their own troops – and for many of those years, Western governments went along with the cover-up.

It's no accident that the facts were admitted only after the Berlin Wall came down; because truth has no better friend than freedom.

Today, in Iraq, there is enormous uncertainty.

Leaders of the major factions are arguing with one another about which coalition should lead a new government and what the composition of that coalition should be.

The situation is tense and there have been incidents of intimidation and outrage.

But the political maneuvering begins from the premise that the right to govern is derived not from a monarch, from an imperial power, from the Heavens above, or from the barrel of a gun.

It is derived from choices made by lorry drivers and auto mechanics, farmers and other citizens whose fingers bear the tell-tale stains of purple ink.

This principle, that power comes from the expression of popular will, can transform a country forever.

In fact, it remains the single most powerful source of human progress on the face of the globe.

People who live in freedom understand this – but so do those who tremble at the consequences of freedom.

Today, as in the past, there are leaders who fear the choices their own people will make – and so offer not real democracy, but counterfeit democracy – through the manipulation of the media, language, and law.

For example, in Sudan and Iran, the recent elections failed to produce a credible reading of popular sentiment.

The balloting planned for Burma later this year will not lift the cloud of repression that, for decades, has hung over that brave land.

In Egypt, a broadening of candidate eligibility is essential if the nation's next presidential vote is to have meaning.

And in Cuba, Fidel Castro is fading from the scene, but Castroism remains a heavy burden on those wishing to act peacefully for democratic change.

We are sometimes told that we cannot affect how governments act inside their borders and that it is inappropriate even to try.

This is old time *realpolitik*, and modern economics now adds to it: China, for example, has made a virtue of doing business with developing countries no matter how irresponsible their internal policies might be.

This practice is calculated to establish what is, for any dictator, a most convenient principle: Because we do not examine the actions of others, others have no right to scrutinize us.

For some, this equates to geopolitical wisdom.

But we at NDI have to ask: what kind of wisdom draws a tarpaulin over the truth?

The reality is that democracy and human rights are essential to social progress.

Social development, in turn, is ultimately the key not only to political evolution and justice, but also to economic development and growth.

This is because the most reliable sources of prosperity are the freedom to innovate, the incentive to produce, and the ability to benefit from the contributions of every citizen.

Democracy building has always been an exercise in hope.

In the past quarter century, we here at NDI have heard every rationale and excuse for denying or delaying that hope.

We have witnessed the clever gambits of despots who see themselves as above any constitution – and heard autocrats twist words until those words have lost all meaning.

We have been called names ourselves – meddlers, busybodies, trouble-makers – and what is worse: idealists.

Yet we continue to believe and to press on, precisely because our commitment to democracy is a matter of conviction, not a rhetorical shell or a bargaining chip.

This fact should be borne in mind even as the United States continues to redefine itself – and to repair its image abroad.

America cannot be America unless it keeps democracy at the very center of its relations with the world.

We might conclude from all this that building democracy is not for the faint of heart.

And we would be right, for as further evidence, we have the example of our guest of honor here tonight.

Morgan Tsvangirai is a leader in the tradition of Poland's Lech Walesa.

The son of a bricklayer, he began his career as a plant operator in a nickel mine.

Around the time of independence, he joined the political movement led by Robert Mugabe and soon became a prominent figure in his country's labor movement.

In 1989, he became secretary general of Zimbabwe's umbrella trade union organization.

He was a patriot who had no desire to separate himself from the political leadership of his country, but as time passed, he found to his dismay that those leaders had chosen to separate themselves from the people of Zimbabwe.

Year by year, the politics of unity degenerated into the exploitation of division, while the interests of the country's citizens received scant attention.

For those who still think that a dominant central government is essential to order and growth, look at what the absence of freedom produced in Zimbabwe: an epidemic of cholera, a complete breakdown in public services, and inflation of two hundred million percent.

Some concluded from this that democracy in Zimbabwe had failed.

But democracy cannot fail unless it is truly tried.

The essence of free government is that when one set of policies is not working, an alternative can be considered.

But when democracy has been subverted, presenting that alternative requires courage, persistence and faith.

Fortunately, Morgan Tsvangirai possesses each of these qualities.

His character is steady and strong; thus, he became that most vulnerable and exposed of figures – the leader of the democratic opposition.

In 1999, he founded the Movement for Democratic Change.

The MDC is broad-based – including students, intellectuals, trade unionists and farmers.

It is also bi-racial – proving that one can be a loyal citizen of Zimbabwe and a proud African regardless of the color of one's skin.

Mr. Tsvangirai's reward was a bogus treason trial, several assassination attempts and, along with party colleagues, a number of brutal beatings.

But Mr. Tsvangirai persevered, and in March 2008, a pivotal election was conducted and he won a higher percentage of the vote than his opponent, President Mugabe.

This was despite the fact that the electoral mechanisms were tilted heavily in favor of the incumbent.

Although a runoff election was scheduled, Mr. Tsvangirai chose to withdraw in the face of the further harassment of his supporters, many of whom were threatened and some murdered.

There followed an extended process that led to the creation of a coalition government with Mr. Tsvangirai as prime minister and Mr. Mugabe remaining as president.

The situation remains difficult, as repression has not ended, but for the first time in many years, the pulse of democracy in Zimbabwe can be felt.

The rate of inflation has been reduced.

Shops are now full with products that people can afford.

And Mr. Tsvangirai is helping to restore his government's international standing.

Since taking office, the prime minister has achieved much; he has also lost much -- including his wife of 31 years in an automobile crash.

Throughout the long years of democratic sacrifice and struggle, Susan Tsvangirai had stood alongside her husband.

NDI is proud to support the Foundation bearing her name that is being established this week to promote human development in Zimbabwe.

Truly, building democracy is not for the faint of heart.

In years past, I have had the pleasure of giving NDI's highest award to some of the leading democratic champions of recent times.

Tonight, I am privileged to recognize a courageous democratic leader of our time.

I am honored to present NDI's 2010 Averell Harriman Democracy Award to the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change and the prime minister of Zimbabwe, Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai.