

**Remarks of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai
NDI 25th Anniversary Dinner Celebration
Washington, DC, May 10, 2010**

Madam Chairman Madeleine Albright,
The President and the Board of Directors of NDI,
The Network of Choco Women of Colombia,
Lord Alderdice,
The former President of Peru, Alejandro Toledo,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honor to be here this evening amongst so many champions for democracy and to receive the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award. I want to thank Chairman Albright for that kind introduction.

It was almost 10 years ago that you welcomed me -- an unknown opposition leader from Zimbabwe -- to a small dining room of supporters here in Washington, D.C. It is characteristic of Madeleine Albright that when no one knew me, or the MDC, that she stepped forward and said, "How can I help you?"

From that dining room to this event, through the enormous challenges both of our nations have faced, you have supported the people of Zimbabwe, and for that I thank you Madam Chairman.

First, I want to say to all of you -- Happy 25th birthday NDI -- I would personally like to thank the many NDI staff and trainers who have worked to promote democracy in Zimbabwe and throughout the world. We appreciate your support and friendship.

I would also like to recognize and thank my family, many of whom are gathered here tonight. It was for you and all Zimbabweans that the struggle was waged and because of you that I was able to find the strength to continue through the darkest of moments.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I recognize that over the past decade and more, I have become one of the better-known faces of the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe -- but I am only one amongst millions of my countrymen and women who believe that our nation, its people and our children deserve to live in a society free from fear of persecution, poverty and hunger.

While my personal circumstances have been well documented, the reality is that many thousands of Zimbabweans have suffered even worse hardships in our struggle for a free society and dignity, and these same Zimbabweans remain committed and determined to continue the peaceful fight until our country is truly democratic.

Secretary Albright has observed that "democracy is a process and not an event," and Zimbabwe proves the veracity of her statement. A process that is often long, painful and daunting -- but it is also a process that, once started, cannot be stopped, diverted or compromised.

In Zimbabwe our determination to build a tolerant, peaceful and prosperous society is driven not only by our knowledge of our inalienable rights as human beings – but also by the memories of the bountiful country that Zimbabwe was in its recent history.

We have lived in a prosperous Zimbabwe – a country that had one of the best education systems in Africa, with the highest literacy rates, the best agriculture output, and a diverse and robust economy.

For over 10 years, my party, the Movement for Democratic Change, has played by the rules and run successful campaigns in four separate elections. While we had, and continue to have, the popular support of a majority of Zimbabweans, each of those elections were manipulated by the former ruling party and condemned by the regional and international community.

In Zimbabwe today the Movement for Democratic Change, has formed a coalition Government with the former ruling party. This was not an easy decision, nor is it a comfortable arrangement. However, it represents another step in Zimbabwe's difficult but certain transition to a true democracy.

In Africa, the struggle for democracy has involved two distinct phases. The first was the fight against colonialism to establish democratic majority rule.

Too often, our founding fathers formed Governments that mimicked the elitist and repressive tendencies of the previous minority regimes. Thus, the second phase of the struggle for democracy has been to replace the so-called "Big Men" of Africa with democratically elected leaders and strong democratic institutions.

Zimbabwe is no exception to this rule, and because the MDC faced a ruthless opponent against which we were only willing to deploy peaceful, democratic agents of change, we have had to be patient – separating long-term objectives from short-term tactics.

This has exposed us to criticism from outside the country where observers mistake the sharing of Government portfolios with the sharing of visions and objectives with our partners in the new administration.

The result of this perception is that the economic and political support we need for the rebuilding of our nation has been postponed by a "wait and see attitude" by some in the international community, or simply ignored by a lack of faith in the ability of the MDC to drive the reform agenda.

Fortunately these attitudes are not all pervasive, and I welcome the moves by the U.S. Senate last week, and in particular, Senators Feingold, Kerry and Isakson, to introduce legislation that recognizes the aims of this transitional phase upon which Zimbabwe has now embarked.

This legislation represents the beginning of a new phase designed to assist us in building new cooperation to receive much needed support for our efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the parties to the Global Political Agreement committed themselves to call for Zimbabwe's full re-integration into the international family of nations. As leader of the MDC and signatory to that agreement, I commit myself to the full realization of provisions of Article 4 of the GPA and, indeed, all the conditions of this agreement.

As Prime Minister, I am aware that the people of Zimbabwe demand the delivery of better services and more profound reforms at a faster rate, and the re-engagement of the international community with Zimbabwe will assist in this process.

Let me assure you that the MDC remains committed to ensuring that this new Government fulfills its mandate of creating the conditions for truly free, fair and legitimate elections to ensure that the will of the people is acknowledged and respected.

Reforming those institutions that formed the pillars of persecution for the previous regime has been painstakingly slow, but which is essential if we are to build a New Zimbabwe.

In this regard, we have been able to ensure that certain gains have been made. Within the next month, Zimbabweans will once again have access to independent daily newspapers thanks to the work of the newly formed Zimbabwe Media Commission.

In addition, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission have been formed and will play a vital role in the reforms that must be instituted in Zimbabwe.

Most importantly, the process to create a new, people-driven constitution is well underway. Our history has shown us that if we are to truly develop as a nation and as a society, there can be no place in the new Zimbabwe for hate speech or the persecution of any sector of our population based on race, gender, tribe, sexual orientation or political affiliation.

In order to move our nation forward and achieve national reconciliation and healing, we must uphold and foster the fundamental principle of tolerance, including tolerance of people that have chosen to live, believe and vote differently from ourselves.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I know that NDI supports the ideals of our struggle, and I salute the work done by your organization in over 100 countries since its formation in 1983.

I am confident that the lessons that your organization has learnt in the past two and half decades will continue to be applied to both ongoing and new democratic struggles as they emerge around the globe.

While we acknowledge the fact that democratization is a process and not an event, we must also acknowledge that it is a process that can also be reversed. Too often, those that form new Governments on the wave of democratic promises and aspirations soon begin to mimic those non-democratic regimes they replaced.

Many countries in Africa today have recognized that true liberation of the people is essential for full economic development. This combined with the enormous advances in information technology means that Africa's opportunity is now.

As African leaders we must end the conspiracy of silence that has often allowed repression to continue unchecked. We must acknowledge and respect the fundamentals of good governance, respect for the rule of law and property rights and the imperative to invest in developing our human capital.

In doing so, we will unleash the full potential of our continent and ensure that Africa takes its rightful place in the world as a fully-fledged partner for progress, prosperity and stability.

Ladies and Gentlemen, apart from the honor of receiving this award this evening, events such as this reaffirm for me that our struggle in Zimbabwe is just one front in the war for human emancipation that has been waged for hundreds of years and that continues to be waged in countries and in communities around the world.

Despite the difference in languages, cultures and traditions, we are united by our innate belief in our fundamental rights as human beings and in the fact that our governments or leaders must act as the guarantors and protectors of such rights.

It is a privilege therefore for me to share the stage this evening with Secretary Albright, the representatives from the Network of Chocó Women of Colombia and with Lord Alderdice, who was a recipient of the Harriman Democracy Award in 1998, and former Peruvian President, distinguished scholar and pro-democracy advocate Alejandro Toledo.

I take heart from the example of those here.

Sadly, the price to be paid in such struggles remains high. Indeed this is a lonely road we travel. There are no maps or directions. In Zimbabwe, no one has been down this road before and so there is no path or template for us to follow.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we will do our part, and we trust that you will travel this road with us – and if the road is bumpy and our way blocked or unclear – you can rest assured we will not veer off the path or be deterred.

It is not the journey we are on that we are interested in – it is only the destination – a free and democratic Zimbabwe. That is my pledge. That is my commitment to you and the people of my country. That is what Zimbabweans demand and deserve.

This is what I pledge to continue to struggle for, and this is why I urge the international community to continue supporting our quest to restore Zimbabwe to a truly free, prosperous and bountiful county.

I thank you.