

**Remarks of Madeleine Albright**  
**- As prepared for delivery -**  
**NDI Dinner**  
**Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Washington, DC**  
**Tuesday, December 9, 2014**

Thank you, Ken, for those kind words, and for all that you and the NDI team have done to make this evening a success.

Welcome, once again, to NDI's Democracy Award Dinner.

I know we are all grateful to Vice President Biden for being our keynote speaker, and for his lifelong commitment to the cause that brings us together tonight – the cause of democracy.

I also want to acknowledge and thank our Board of Directors. They are passionate supporters of NDI's mission, and a tremendous resource for this organization.

Tonight, we celebrate more than thirty years of NDI.

In doing so, we also express our gratitude to the man whose career is inseparable from this organization and all that it has accomplished.

For nearly three decades, Ken Wollack has nourished NDI, fought for it, and recruited a brilliant team to run its programs.

As I am fond of saying, he has made NDI the most outstanding pro-democracy outfit since Pericles.

So thank you Ken, for never flinching from the hard work necessary to help democracy succeed.

This persistence is especially important today, when it so often feels that democracy is under siege around the world.

Outbreaks of ethnic violence, the resurgence of violent extremism, and the return of strongmen to the Middle East are just some of the forces standing in the way of democratic progress – not to mention the delusional thinking and outright deceitfulness of a certain Russian leader.

There are many tough obstacles standing in the way of NDI's work, but as Senator Robert Kennedy once pointed out, if no one is in your way, it is probably because you are not going anywhere.

All of us are here tonight because we believe in going somewhere – toward freedom, toward human rights, and toward the kind of democratic systems that deliver.

We share a love of justice and a belief that freedom and education are essential to human progress.

We also know that while democracy may be the best system of government ever devised, it does not come with a set of directions for easy assembly.

Building a strong democracy is a process that can take years, if not decades. And if democracy is not attended to constantly, its progress can halt and easily slide into reverse.

Over the past few years the world has learned once again that it is far easier to spark a revolution than to sustain it. Because while protests can trigger a revolution, only politics can guarantee its success – and that is the theme of tonight's dinner.

The road from the city square to governance requires leaders who combine practical politics with the right principles. The reason we need both is that unless we are practical, we will spin our idealistic wheels; unless we are principled, we will drive off in the wrong direction.

This evening, we are honored to be in the company of three such principled pragmatists – the recipients of this year's Democracy Awards.

At last year's awards dinner, some of you may remember that reports were streaming in of a crackdown in Kiev, where thousands of protestors were camped out on the Maidan.

Tonight's honorees were among those leading the calls for change – as activists, journalists, and community organizers.

What distinguishes these individuals is not simply that they sought liberty – for seeking something is no great accomplishment.

What sets them apart is that they – and others like them – acted upon their desires.

They are not merely dreamers; they are doers.

And in the past year, each of them did something important – and courageous – in moving from the protest camps to the campaign trail.

That word, courage, is often applied to those who stand in protest against an authoritarian government. But it is not as often used to describe those who join the democratic political process.

It should be, because it is easy to criticize the system from the sidelines after winning freedom.

It is harder, and riskier, to decide that you are willing to do the unglamorous work necessary to govern. But it is the only way to implement lasting change.

So tonight we celebrate three people who have had the courage to govern: **Serhiy Leshchenko** [sair-HEE LESH-en-kuh]; **Oleksandr Solontay** [ah-lek-SAHN-der sah-lun-TAI]; and **Hanna Hopko** [HAH-nuh hop-KOH].

Their story, which you will hear more about in a minute, brings to mind that of another protestor turned politician, my friend Vaclav Havel.

It was twenty-five years ago last month that the Velvet Revolution toppled communism in my native Czechoslovakia, and lifted up one of the unlikeliest figures to ever become a president.

Havel was a playwright and a philosopher, not a politician. But his grasp of politics was sharp enough that he recognized the perils of governing – especially in a country undergoing a wrenching democratic transition.

As he told one of his close aides in the wake of the revolution, “we are coming in as heroes, but in the end, when they realize what a mess we’re in and how little we can do about it, they will railroad us, tarred and feathered, out of town.”

Havel knew that stability and true democracy could not be attained easily or painlessly – and that it could cost him his reputation and his career. But he also knew, as he put it, that “you can’t spend your whole life criticizing something and then, when you have the chance to do it better, refuse to go near it.”

Throughout his time in public life, Vaclav Havel practiced politics of a type designed not to reflect popular opinion, but to elevate and enlighten it; the kind of leadership that prompted us to open our eyes and demand more of ourselves – and that placed him in a category with Lincoln, Gandhi, and Mandela.

Havel often told me how important it had been for him and his democratic compatriots to know that, during the Cold War’s long dark years, there were people in the West who thought about them and were eager to help in whatever ways were possible.

This experience left him with a sense of obligation – that he invited us all to share – toward men and women on every continent who must still struggle for recognition of their most basic rights.

Havel believed that, although dictatorial regimes would come and go, the pursuit of a more democratic and humane world would remain a necessity as long as our race survives.

That is why, in the final months of his life, Havel signed the October 2011 Budapest Appeal, calling upon Europe to take a stand against any government – even a freely elected one – that abuses its power by undermining democratic institutions. His last public statements were in support of prisoners of conscience in Belarus and of opposition protests in Moscow where, on the day of his funeral, 80,000 demonstrators observed a moment of silence to mark his passing.

Havel would have proudly stood with the Ukrainian people as well. I thought of him when I visited the Maidan in May as part of NDI's international election observation mission, because the protestors in Kiev stood firmly on the shoulders of those once labeled as rabble rousers or refuseniks, dissidents or enemies of the people. And they must know, as their predecessors did, that we in the West stand firmly with them. We can never accept reckless attempts to redraw Europe's borders by force, nor attempts to rewrite the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The road ahead for Ukraine will not be easy. But the Ukrainian people deserve the opportunity to chart their own future, and in that effort they have a friend and ally in NDI.

I am proud that in our work in Ukraine we once again find ourselves very much on the right side of history, because we will always reflect the hopes and aspirations of people everywhere.

It is now my pleasure to introduce a short film about tonight's honorees and their transition from protest to politics.

I am now delighted to present NDI's Democracy Awards to our honorees, **Serhiy Leshchenko** ; **Oleksandr Solontay** ; and **Hanna Hopko**.

Thank you once again to our honorees, and my thanks to all of you for your support of NDI, and your commitment to the cause of helping democracy succeed.

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