



# CODE '11 Budapest Conference on Democracy and Human Rights

Organized by the International Centre for Democratic Transition and the Tom Lantos Institute

Budapest, June 28, 2011

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Thank you very much Istvan. I agree with you that that is the most important challenge and I will try to be worthy of the task and we can ask my grandmother and my mother afterwards whether I accomplished that goal. Both personally and professionally, it is a tremendous privilege to be with all of you today. I was fortunate to make my first trip to Hungary when I was four years old, at a time when this was a very different place. A very different country. And since that moment, this is a nation and this is a city that has been inextricably linked in my mind with both the opportunities and the challenges of democratization and it is a great privilege to be back with you today in a city that I love and in a country that I love to speak about these issues. Like Hungary the rest of the world has undergone extraordinary changes over the last few decades and I'd like to begin by asking you to walk with me through some of the changes that we've witnessed recently.

Let's start at the beginning of the year when there was a government in place in Egypt that – if you believed the experts – was a very stable government. It had, after all, been there for thirty years and there was no sign that it was going anywhere. And yet, in the course of 18 days, we saw changes unfold that completely re-contoured the landscape of a country of 80 million people, and left us in a very different world.

One month earlier, we witnessed similar changes in Tunisia, where you had a government that had been in place almost as long – 23 years – and was one of the most efficient authoritarian regimes in the world. But in the space of a few weeks, we saw Tunisia's history turn in a dramatically different and a dramatically more hopeful direction. And no one had anticipated, again, those changes.

Look back over the last decade, and you'll find more examples of change. You'll find governments agreeing to take steps to combat climate change that they never would have considered on their own. You'll find extraordinary efforts to reduce the debt burden of the world's poorest nations that led to debt forgiveness of hundreds of billions of dollars. And you'll see the rise of the micro credit movement and efforts to direct resources toward investment in curing diseases like HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Look back a little further though – particularly in this region – and we will remember the changes of 1989 that resulted in one of the most powerful empires the world has ever known being washed away down the river of history.

The common denominator as we review all of these epic stories of democracy in action is civil society.

In every American passport, there is a quote from the great theologian and activist Harry Emerson Fosdick that reads "Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people." And civil society, as these examples illustrate, is often the place where we see those possibilities manifest.



Secretary Clinton, my boss, is fond of saying that our countries are supported by three pillars that work together like three legs of a stool: We have government, where political activity takes place. We have the private sector, where we work for financial gain. And then we have civil society, where we come together in organizations and religious congregations; as individuals, artists, journalists, and activists and work through peaceful means to make our societies better.

Now, civil society – this concept of individuals coming together to take collective action for a greater cause – is not new, it's been with us for some time. If we look at the United States, my country, we see that civil society gave rise to the original movement for American independence. It provided the push for the abolition of slavery, for women's rights, for civil rights, for the protection of workers, the environment, and scores of other critical social advances.

So, in different forms civil society has been with us for a while, and yet in terms of its size and its influence, it is expanding and expanding rapidly. If we look at the ranks of international civil society organizations, which are a little bit easier to keep track of, we find that in 1990 there were about 6,000 international NGOs. Today, that number has expanded ten-fold, up to 60,000. And the ranks of these groups continue to grow quickly the rate of change we see as a result of this expansion is growing with it. And we recognize now that technological advances are making it easier for individuals to come together around common interests and take common action that serve the common good.

So what does this mean for those of us who are in the business of engaging other countries and the business of diplomacy — and frankly, what does it mean for those of us who are in the business of advancing democracy? Many of us have a lot of practice and our countries have a lot of practice that we've developed over generations and centuries engaging other countries and developing tools that allow us to work in cooperation with other governments. But what happens when we're no longer conducting diplomacy in formal state rooms, and are instead looking at public squares? What does it mean when we have to change the very concept of how we conduct diplomacy? And, when we have to change the target audience of our diplomacy, and our international engagement, from individuals that we find at conferences like this to community activists, how do we readjust our expectations and redesign the architecture of our engagement with the world in order to take advantage of this opportunity?

Well, first, we have to recognize what István and Foreign Minister Martonyi said: this is a major shift in the way we work, and it will require some serious effort to accommodate this new reality. And we're starting that process at the State Department. Last year we undertook an effort called the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. And I have to apologize to the translators every time I say this because we do not believe in cruel and unusual punishment; we tend to shorten this to QDDR, which is a little bit easier to articulate. And as part of this process, we carried out a top-to-bottom re-evaluation of every bureau, every program, and every initiative of the State Department. One of the key conclusions of that effort was a realization that we need to do more to engage with partners beyond the state. Instead of simply targeting our diplomacy at public officials like we've done in the past, we need to go out into communities. We need to engage with civic organizations. And we need to look beyond the usual suspects and find new partners that can help us advance a common agenda.

Then, a year ago this week, Secretary Clinton went to a special meeting of the Community of Democracies in Krakow, and gave a landmark speech in which she laid out her vision for advancing civil society and strengthening it as a force in our diplomacy. On Friday of this week after visiting Budapest, Secretary Clinton will go back before the Community of Democracies and report on our progress. And, fortunately, together with many partners, including many partners in this room we have made a lot of progress over the last year.

- **We've refocused the UN Human Rights Council on the challenge of Defending Civil Society, which previously was one of the only issues, the right of freedom of assembly and freedom of association, was one of the only issues in the Universal Declaration of Human rights that did not have a special mandate from the Human Rights council.** In September we saw the passage of a historic resolution that created a new mandate around this issue. And in March, the first ever UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association was appointed.

- **We've made similar progress in regional organizations.** In the OAS for example, the Organization of American States, we've seen the passage of the first resolution on this subject that has opened the door to more civil society participation in the OAS.
- **We've made huge strides in coordinating diplomatic pressure when civil society is threatened.** There is a Canadian-led working group in the Community of Democracies that has coordinated diplomatic action in five instances over the last year when draft legislation that was under consideration threatened to impose serious restrictions on civil society in different countries. And in every single case where we took action together, the restrictive legislation did not come into law.
- **We've amplified the voices of civil society activists in our diplomacy.** In February of this year, Secretary Clinton launched a new high level dialogue that was based on the architecture of what we call Strategic Dialogues that we conduct with other countries. And I'll say, for just a moment, about what these are. When we recognize the need for sustained high level diplomatic engagement with a range of partners, on occasion we will launch one of these strategic dialogues that brings together all of the senior officials from our government with all of the senior officials from a foreign government across the full spectrum of issues where we work. And up until now we had never done this with partners outside of government and this was the first time we did so with partners in civil society. And we didn't just look at democracy activists. We found the head of the world's largest labor organization from Australia. We found human rights activists from Africa. We brought in Transparency International, the world's largest organization working to promote good governance and accountability. And we found others working across a whole range of issues that can help us develop a common vision for how to work together. In addition to civil society representatives from 30 countries that joined us in Washington to take part in this event, we also had 55 of our embassies around the world reach out to civil society activists who participated through video conferencing and submitted questions that helped us formulate the agenda, including I might add civil society activists from Hungary where Ambassador Kounalakis has been extraordinarily active in advancing this agenda. We settled on three initial areas of focus, and we hope to add more: We're working on governance and accountability; democracy and human rights; and empowering women. And on Friday, Secretary Clinton will host another session of this Dialogue with activists from all over the world in advance of the Community of Democracies meeting in Vilnius.
- **We're also giving activists access to new technologies to make their work safer and more effective.** U.S.-sponsored TechCamps are taking place around the World that bring together leaders in the technology sector with leaders in civil society and provide them with software and other platforms that enable them to do their work with greater security and a greater voice.
- **And finally, we are re-doubling our commitment to provide financial support for this work. We have doubled our technical assistance for cases where governments restrict the space in which NGOs can operate.**
- **And together with Freedom House and a dozen other countries, we've launched a new fund called Lifeline that addresses urgent needs when NGOs come under attack.** These include legal representation, medical bills arising from abuse, transportation costs for the visitation of incarcerated activists, and the replacement of equipment that is damaged as a result of harassment.

We have delivered on every single commitment that the Secretary made in Krakow, and we are continuing to make support for civil society a centerpiece of our efforts to advance democracy. Now this is a big priority for the United States, but it's something that applies to each of us, regardless of what country we come from or what sector of society we work in, or what our interests may be. Because, ultimately, civil society is about more than simply being another branch of the three-legged stool that I spoke of earlier. A generation of social science teaches us that civil society can do something that no other element of our society can replicate as effectively. The work of civil society replenishes the reservoir of trust that irrigates everything we do in our communities and our countries.



Ultimately, it is civil society and the trust that is generated through civil society that allows us to work together in governments and in the private sector. And in civil society we come together around shared values and shared interests, and work to advance an agenda that can build the bonds between individuals that facilitate cooperation. And unless we have that trust holding our societies together, everything we do in other realms becomes exponentially more difficult. So our work to strengthen civil society is bigger than any individual issue. It's bigger than any individual agenda. It's about generating the basic force that holds our countries and our communities together.

And it's also about recognizing that no one person, no one party, and no single portion of the political spectrum will ever provide all the solutions we need in our societies. In democracies, our strength comes from diversity. And civil society is where we find that pluralism and diversity.

I began by asking you to think about some of the changes that we've witnessed in the last three months, in the last ten years, and in the last twenty years. I'd ask you to take a moment now to think about the changes that we will witness in the next three months, the next ten years, and the next twenty years.

Think about how civil society will bring about those changes, and then decide for yourself that you're going to be a part of that. Remember the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick: "Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people." And decide that regardless of where you work or what you do now, you're going to be a part of the extraordinary things that are accomplished through civil society. You can join a civic organization; you can join a neighborhood group or a religious congregation or a volunteer group; it can maybe be one that you start yourself. But, make sure that you're going to be a part of this work. Make sure that you're going to be a part of building the trust that is the lifeblood of our communities.

Because when we do this, we'll find that we not only experience the benefits of progress on these individual issues that we seek to address through civil society, but also the benefits of greater cohesion, and a greater commitment among each of us to each other. Let me conclude by coming back to my grandfather. This was always his commitment and always his mission, that by strengthening the bonds that tie each of us together we can build stronger communities. We can build stronger societies. I know that if he were here today he would want us to advance that message. He would want us to build on the work of the Tom Lantos Institute, the International Center for Democratic Transition and other organizations that are working to strengthen democracy both here in Hungary and around the world. And as we continue that message I'm confident that we can have a portion of that legacy in our own lives and we will be able to carry on the tradition and the inheritance that he has left to each of us who share his values.

Thank you.