



CODE '11 Budapest Conference on Democracy and Human Rights

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

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Remarks by Ambassador David T. Killion Ambassador and U.S. Permanent Representative to UNESCO

Ambassador Várkonyi;
Dr. Gyarmati;
Distinguished guests;

Thank you so much for your invitation to speak at this First Annual Conference on Democracy and Human Rights organized by the Tom Lantos Institute, the International Center for Democratic Transition, and the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. It is an honor to speak to you today about an important aspect of the legacy of my mentor, Tom Lantos, the late Congressman from California. I want to extend my thanks to the organizers for pulling this important event together.

It is entirely fitting that this Institute be established here in Budapest, where Tom Lantos was born, where he was arrested at the age of 16 by the Nazis, where he was rescued by Raoul Wallenberg, where he fought in the Resistance, and where he lost most of his family to the Holocaust.

These terrible events marked Tom deeply, but he never gave up on his homeland. Though he emigrated to the U.S. after the war, he returned many times throughout his life to Hungary to speak out for human rights, particularly those of minorities.

As a Holocaust survivor, Tom felt an incredible sense of responsibility to speak out so the world would never forget what happened. He would be so pleased to know that this Institute has been established in Budapest to continue the work to which he devoted his life.

Tom Lantos once told me that he arrived in the United States with five dollars in his pocket and a scholarship to attend the University of Washington in Seattle. He turned those five dollars and that scholarship into one of the most brilliant and meaningful diplomatic and political careers in the history of America, becoming both a true American patriot and a committed global citizen.

Tom always said with a look of pride and deep satisfaction on his glowing face that he was an "American by choice, and not by birth." In his mind's eye, the United States had rescued him; it had rescued Europe, and it had rescued civilization. Tom was more grateful than anyone in the world for the thousands of white crosses; stars of David; and crescents that stretch row after row beyond the horizon at the Coleville-sur-Mer cemetery in Normandy.

Like President Reagan, who is also being honored in Budapest this week, Tom believed the United States was a shining city on a hill. But Tom also believed that the United States had a profound obligation and a profound interest to be consistently and fully engaged in the real world – the world that came together after the war to try to recover and heal through the birth of the United Nations.

Tom was at once the UN's staunchest supporter and its loudest critic. He always said that the UN was a perfectly imperfect institution that represented all of the strengths and shortcomings of its 192 member states. Tom repeatedly



reminded us that the UN was a "democracy" made up of "military dictatorships, single-party states, tyrannies, autocracies, oligarchies and democracies" each having a voice and a vote.

But rather than its faults, Tom focused on how the guiding principles of the UN reflected universal human values profoundly influenced by the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Tom saw the Charter of the United Nations; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the UNESCO Constitution as sacred documents. He believed these texts were as much a legacy of the profound sacrifice of the Americans lying beneath the Coleville turf as was his own freedom.

Tom believed that with truly universal principles etched in stone at the UN the U.S. and its democratic allies had time and moral force on their side to focus and improve the UN. He believed that with what he always called "tough-minded engagement" the U.S. could fight effectively throughout the UN to keep the Organization on track.

When we worked together to influence moral contests at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, at UNESCO in Paris, or at the 3rd Committee in New York, Tom would often vent about how much it frustrated him that the U.S. rarely applied the same diplomatic skill and leverage in Geneva or Paris that it did at the UN Security Council on matters relating to more traditional core U.S. security interests.

Because Tom believed deeply in the opportunity that the UN provided the U.S. to advance human freedom, it pained him deeply when the U.S. abandoned UNESCO in 1983. When I joined his staff in Congress in 2001, Tom asked me to develop a strategy to return the U.S. to UNESCO. Later that same year he introduced and helped pass legislation that authorized President Bush to return the U.S. to the organization.

In 2002, after working with Tom to build a broad coalition of NGO's and political leaders in favor a U.S. return, I sat with Tom in his office as he watched President Bush announce to the world at the UN General Assembly that the United States was rejoining UNESCO "in support of human dignity." I believe it was one of his proudest moments. It was inspiring for me to experience it with him.

Since that time the United States has successfully used its engagement at UNESCO and other UN agencies the way Tom envisioned it -- to advance human dignity and human freedom. We have done so now under two Administrations, one Republican and one Democrat, demonstrating the value of a strong multilateral approach.

Tom had an unshakeable belief in the power of the United States to serve as the world's moral lodestar. As an internationalist, Tom felt that working together, the world community could effect real change. He believed that U.S. diplomacy at its best could expose corruption; challenge bankrupt ideologies; thwart dictators; rally democracies; and improve global institutions.

I call that "tough minded engagement" the "Lantos Doctrine."

Since the United States rejoined UNESCO in 2003, we have been putting the "Lantos Doctrine" into action at UNESCO --- demonstrating that despite the UN's faults, the United States can make good use of the UN system to promote democratic values; defend liberty; and advance freedom.

Uniquely within the UN family, UNESCO provides us the opportunity to build peace by promoting and defending the building blocks of our civilization – education, science, communication and culture. As Tom saw it, UNESCO is the UN Organization most specifically constructed as a response to the Holocaust to defend the highest values of human civilization.

Indeed, the first line of UNESCO constitution affirms that view. It says: "*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.*"

UNESCO's constitution calls for it to promote education, science and culture for the specific purpose of furthering universal respect for justice, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations.

This is a very powerful mandate. My delegation sees it as our role to ensure that it is respected at UNESCO. We remain actively engaged in many issues, sometimes through quiet diplomacy, sometimes raising the volume a bit, but never failing to act when we see things going off track.

This is why we spoke out last year against an effort by President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, a despot who has clung to power for over 30 years, to establish a prize in name at UNESCO. As we and many others saw it, UNESCO's



mandate is not compatible with lending its name to benefit a dictator. By joining together with other democracies, human rights groups, the world scientific community, UNESCO laureates and many others, the U.S. ensured that the so-called Obiang Prize was effectively stopped.

We also put the Lantos Doctrine into action was when the Iranian government tried to hijack UNESCO's World Philosophy Day – an event which honors philosophers, teachers and other thinkers who exercise and defend freedom of expression – for its own repressive purposes. Philosophers and human rights groups were outraged that UNESCO would consider co-sponsoring a major event with the Iranian regime.

Again, the United States, with a coalition of like-minded countries, insisted that UNESCO withdraw its support for the event in Tehran. In the end, we were able to ensure that UNESCO withdraw co-sponsorship of the Iranian event and disassociate itself from Iran's repressive educational policies.

But lest you think our entire focus at UNESCO is in thwarting dictators, let me tell you about the many positive opportunities we have found there to come together with other countries to promote democratic values and cross-cultural understanding.

Tom Lantos was someone who believed that we must all fight for human dignity. UNESCO is at the heart of that fight. Through its many education programs, it is teaching generations of children and young people around the world about the importance of mutual respect and human rights.

But our work is not focused only on children. UNESCO plays an important role helping to promote cross-cultural understanding at every level. As a multilateral organization, it is well placed to confront corrosive trends that can arise, such as the troubling spread of Holocaust denial in certain parts of the world.

To try to address this, UNESCO's Director-General Irina Bokova led a multi-faith delegation to Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp last February to help leaders confront the reality of the Holocaust. It was a difficult yet important trip that brought together Holocaust survivors, Muslim clerics, political and religious dignitaries, including the Presidents of Senegal and Georgia, many current ministers and ambassadors, and former leaders of France, Germany, Turkey.

Together, we marked the anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp, walking along the old railroad tracks that brought the trains full of prisoners, peering into the barracks where they slept and died, and shuddering as we imagined the agony and the suffering that had occurred there.

As we walked, one of the Muslim clerics turned to me. "I wanted to see this with my own eyes," he said, "so I could teach others about the evil of hate. This should never happen again, to anybody."

That such a group came together, with UNESCO's help, to share this experience was, in itself, a milestone in bringing us closer to the goals of reconciliation and peace.

Likewise, the U.S. and many other countries came together in 2007 to give UNESCO the mandate to develop Holocaust Education. Israel, the U.S. and France have contributed funding to this effort, and we are exploring how the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. might collaborate with UNESCO. If there is interest, we would be delighted to involve the Lantos Institute as well.

There are many other tools UNESCO uses to promote human rights and democratic values. UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communications – IPDC -- funds programs that help develop independent media around the world. These include programs in the Middle East and North Africa, where IPDC projects made a contribution to the Arab Spring.

UNESCO is also very active speaking out for the rights and safety of journalists. Every year, UNESCO awards the "Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize" to a person who has made a notable contribution to the defense of press freedom, especially if this involved risk. In 2011, the prize went to Iranian journalist Ahmad Zeidabadi, who has been held for the last two years in an Iranian prison as a result of his courageous efforts to cover the 2009 Iranian





election.

UNESCO also works quietly to adjudicate human rights cases brought to its attention. Twice a year, behind closed doors, its Committee on Conventions and Recommendations reviews cases of people who have been imprisoned for alleged affronts to their governments.

Under this procedure, this Committee examines complaints received from a person, group of persons or NGO's relating to cases concerning the exercise of human rights in UNESCO's fields of competence, including the right to education, information, freedom of opinion and expression.

The Committee studies the complaints and consults with the Representatives of the member state concerned, and frequently directs specific requests to that government. Written responses from the governments are also considered, and cases are kept on the Committee list for ongoing review until the Committee decides to remove them.

This confidential process exerts quiet pressure on governments by forcing them to respond to human rights complaints from their citizens before fellow governments. This unique mechanism, which works quietly and out of the public limelight, has resulted in the release of several prisoners, achieving results in cases that could not be solved through more public interventions. This is yet another way that UNESCO contributes to the cause of human rights.

UNESCO is also concerned about the rights of youth, particularly those in war-torn countries or in areas affected by violence. UNESCO's experts work to promote government policies, such as their "Open Schools" and "Open Places" programs, that give young people a safe place to go to avoid gangs and street violence. Earlier this month, UNESCO inducted American actor Forest Whitaker as a Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation. He has pledged to help UNESCO in this important work.

Tom, as you may know, was the co-founder and co-Chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. He said that his daily goal was to implement Raoul Wallenberg's message that human rights are indivisible and sacred. I think he would be proud to see the work that UNESCO on behalf of human rights and freedom in so many spheres.

Tom said that the "veneer of civilization is paper thin." He saw what happens when civilization collapses. As he saw it, all of us must work to safeguard it.

The work ahead of those of you who will help make the Tom Lantos Institute a living, dynamic and powerful tool to spread the concept of basic freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is enormous. I offer you my encouragement, appreciation and support. I know Tom, if he could be here, would thank you and urge you forward.

In closing, I would like to share a story that Tom used to tell about a Rabbi and his students: The Rabbi asked his young followers this question: "How can one know the moment when the night has ended and the dawn has come?"

One student responded, "Is it when a man walking through the woods can tell whether the approaching animal is a wolf or a dog?" The Rabbi shook his head no.

Another student volunteered, "Isn't it when a man walking through the village can distinguish the roof of his house from that of his neighbors? Once again the Rabbi shook his head.

Then the Rabbi spoke: "The moment when you know that the night has turned to day is when you see the face of a stranger and recognize him as your brother." Let us pray for the dawn of that day.

Thank you.