

**Remarks of NDI President Kenneth Wollack at
Welcome Luncheon for International Leaders Forum
Democratic National Convention
Los Angeles, California
August 14, 2000**

Welcome to this opening luncheon for the International Visitors Forum. For those of you who I haven't introduced myself to, I am Ken Wollack, the President of the National Democratic Institute, and on behalf of our Board of Directors, I want to thank you for being with us for this very special occasion.

NDI is proud of our links to the Democratic Party, which is and has been a proponent of internationalism and democracy. However, our endeavors are global and nonpartisan. NDI seeks to help build democracy. We support programs that enable democrats, with a small "d", from throughout the world to share expertise and ideas. As the community of democracies has grown, democratic practice has become inseparable from democratic cooperation. We have heard much about economic globalization. But our shared experience, our ability to help each other is part of a new political globalization.

I want to recognize some of our guests in the audience. First, I want to welcome the hundreds of international visitors—heads of government, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, political party leaders, diplomats—to NDI's week-long International Leaders Forum. Your presence personifies the nature of our work. NDI brings people together with diverse experiences to share what they know, what they have seen, and what they have learned.

While we celebrate the coming together of democratic practitioners, there are stark reminders that this simple act is still forbidden in too many places of the world. The recipient of NDI's annual democracy award four years ago at this same International Leaders Forum in Chicago personifies the hard reality that the democratic struggle goes on against tremendous odds. I had the privilege to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi 10 months earlier in Rangoon. And in this country, as elsewhere, her cause continues to transcend politics and ideology. Suu Kyi's husband, Dr. Michael Aris, traveled from Great Britain to accept her Award in 1996. He has since died and, during his illness, denied the opportunity to see his wife by Burma's brutal regime.

This year, we were to have presented NDI's 15th annual Democracy Award here in L.A. to Indonesian President Wahid, former South African President Nelson Mandela and two remarkable Americans, Peter and Linda Biehl. Because of unforeseen scheduling problems the award event will be held later in Washington. All four recipients represent the triumph of democratic ideas over sacrifice and tragedy.

But, I would like to recognize Peter and Linda Biehl, native Californians, who are here today. As you all know from many news articles and broadcasts, the Biehl's daughter, Amy, a former NDI staff member, was killed in South Africa, almost to this day, seven years ago while working there on a Fulbright Scholarship. In describing Peter and Linda Biehl, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has used the South African word *obunto*, which means the essence of humanity. The term captures the efforts undertaken by the Biehls to reflect their daughter's convictions, and realize

her dream for human dignity through the Amy Biehl Foundation, which focuses on violence prevention and conflict resolution in disadvantaged neighborhoods in South Africa. Through the Foundation, the Biehls have resolved to build a constructive legacy from personal despair. Peter and Linda, and their daughter Kim and son Zack, thank you for being with us.

We are honored by the presence of members of Congress. The United States Congress is a special institution for democratic activists around the world. In many instances, it has provided them with the first international recognition of their struggles. The Congress is a special institution for NDI for another reason. Without Congressional support for NDI and its sister organizations we would not have the ability to work in virtually every part of the world we are now engaged.

I want to single out for appreciation Gary Winnick and Global Crossing for sponsoring this wonderful event and for the other contributors—corporations, trade unions and individuals—whose generosity has made this International Leaders Forum possible. At its heart, NDI is a public/private partnership. It represents a community of interest between the private sector and our public institutions, between business and labor: that everyone benefits when people are treated with dignity and have the freedom to control their destinies.

And from our own National Democratic Institute, I want to acknowledge several people in particular. Paul Kirk, our chairman, from whom you will hear shortly, and the Institute's Board of Directors, who support and guide our work year in and year out.

I want to say a special word of thanks to NDI's vice president, Jean Dunn who has managed this enormously complex International Leaders Forum, along with the rest of NDI, with competence and grace. She, Mary Hill and the rest of the NDI staff have invested countless hours making the Forum a serious and enjoyable experience.

I also want to welcome someone very special to this country and to NDI. Walter Mondale is one of America's most respected public servants. And as the former long-serving chairman of NDI, he was instrumental in the Institute's growth and development.

Finally, NDI has enjoyed the support of three Administrations, and we are proud to associate ourselves strongly with the Clinton-Gore Administration's commitment to the promotion of democracy abroad. Our work, I believe, helps to give concrete expression to this commitment and we are pleased that so many officials from the Administration have joined us this afternoon. In particular I would like to recognize the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Dan Glickman, and the administration's special envoy for democracy in Africa, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who will be speaking to the Convention tomorrow evening.

We are particularly honored to welcome our special speakers, President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. This is an appropriate time to recognize their many achievements as well as the challenges that lie ahead. Democracy is never a simple process nor are its benefits easily won. Yet we hope that this luncheon, and the community of liberty it symbolizes, will only grow further in the future.

Former House of Representatives Speaker Tip O'Neill once commented that "all politics is local" and, therefore I want to recognize NDI's hometown mayor, Anthony Williams, the mayor of the nation's capital.

Now, moving west, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Mayor Richard J. Riordan of Los Angeles.

I don't know whether this is the first time, but it is a rare occurrence that a Democratic mayor has hosted a Republican National Convention and a Republican mayor has hosted a Democratic National Convention in the same year. This is a stark reminder that politics makes strange bedfellows. More importantly, it demonstrates how parties can compete and cooperate simultaneously in pursuit of common objectives.

Mayor Riordan leads one of the largest cities in the country and the most ethnically diverse. He deserves great credit for spearheading the effort to make this convention the spectacular event it will be. Ladies and gentlemen, Mayor Richard J. Riordan.