

Remarks of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi

NDI Democracy Luncheon

Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, DC

Pelosi to NDI: 'America Must Reclaim Its Rightful Place in the Community of Nations'

Washington, D.C. -- *Speaker Nancy Pelosi delivered remarks at the National Democratic Institute's Democracy luncheon. Here are her remarks as prepared:*

"It was a great honor to receive the invitation to participate in NDI's Democracy Luncheon from Secretary Madeleine Albright. As Ambassador to the United Nations, she represented our nation with great distinction. As Secretary of State, she led a principled foreign policy improving our alliances and promoting democracy all over the world. She is a great American statesman.

"Averell Harriman, another great American statesman, would be so proud to know that an award named for him has been given to the first woman elected to lead an African nation: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

"I had the opportunity to visit President Sirleaf in Liberia. Our congressional delegation saw a leader revered by her people, challenged by the difficulties in her country, and determined to make progress.

"At that time, I had the privilege of inviting her to address a joint meeting of Congress. When she came to Washington, it was an historic occasion. We were moved by her values statement of leadership and respect for all. It was a particular moment of inspiration when she said, 'I ran for president because I am determined to see good governance in Liberia in my lifetime. But I also ran because I am the mother of four, and I wanted to see our children smile again.'

"Making the future brighter for our children is also the work of Sierra Leone's 50/50 Group. By encouraging gender equality among your nation's leaders, you are building democratic strength in your nation for generations to come. You are deserving of the high honor of receiving a

grant named for Madeleine Albright.

"We come together today grateful for the efforts of the National Democratic Institute to promote and strengthen democracy worldwide. Thank you, Kenneth Wollack, for your leadership as President of NDI.

"America has been the greatest force for peace and freedom in history because we have sought to use our power wisely and generously.

"Everywhere I travel, the call is clear: the world needs America to lead. We must reclaim our rightful place in the community of nations, with a sustainable foreign policy that reflects American values.

"Our relationship with any country should help make the world safer, economies stronger, and people freer. Three pillars of U.S. foreign policy are: protecting our national security, growing our economy by increasing American exports abroad; and promoting democratic freedom and human rights around the world.

"The world is changing rapidly and so are the threats we face. They range from an improvised explosive device to a nuclear weapon; a threat as small as a virus to one as large as Hurricane Katrina; a lone wolf terrorist to a rogue nation; and the weakness of energy dependence to the fury of despair in the developing world.

"We must have goals as ambitious as the risks we face: to win the war on terror, to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and to fight the long-term conditions that breed poverty, disease, instability and environmental degradation.

"We serve our interests and the world's when we demonstrate our leadership and our values in places like Darfur – using all our diplomatic and economic leverage to end the genocide.

"One week ago today, President Bush and Congress awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It was an extraordinary day when America's bipartisan leadership spoke with one clear voice for the Tibetan people in their struggle for freedom.

"Courageous people in Burma and democratic champion Aung Sun Suu Kyi are also fighting for the soul of their country. Let there be no doubt that the United States stands with them in their just cause.

"I am proud that the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House just passed tough new sanctions on those responsible for gross violations of human rights in Burma. I commend the President and the First Lady for their leadership on this issue.

"The pursuit of freedom is difficult. There are times when our democratic values seem at odds with other interests. But it is in our national interest to reconcile them.

"We should not accept the false choices among protecting our national security, promoting economic opportunity, and advancing human rights. We can and must achieve all of them.

"In my travels as Speaker, I have met with presidents, prime ministers, and kings. But I also always meet with dissidents, women, and young people. These encounters impress and inspire me.

"At a time when some world leaders question the value of constructive dialogue with our adversaries, young people are engaged in their own international dialogue – in real time.

"The philosopher Hannah Arendt once observed that nations are driven by the endless flywheel of violence believing that one last, one final violent gesture will bring peace. But, each time they sow the seeds for more violence. Words, not weaponry, are the tools of a new civilization.

"Young people are talking – over email and through blogs - about their hopes for a brighter future – of their desire for peace and prosperity. They are weary of war, and weary of their leaders using war, or the threat of war, to fail to build them a better future.

"It is the impatience of youth that gives me hope.

"They want to know if their leaders have the courage to make the tough decisions for peace. They want an end to war in the Middle East. They want an end to violence in Africa, especially in Darfur. They want an end to the war in Iraq.

"In every country I visit, and here at home, I thank our troops for their patriotism, their service, and for the sacrifice they are willing to make. Our troops have done everything asked of them. They have performed excellently.

"The Iraqi government has not.

“Retired generals tell us that to have stability in the region, we must redeploy our troops out of Iraq. There is bipartisan support for redeploying our troops so we can refocus on the real war on terrorism, rebuild our military readiness, and regain our reputation in the world.

“To salute our men and women in uniform, let us build a future that is worthy of the sacrifice of our troops, worthy of the vision of our founders, and worthy of the aspirations of our children.

“To build that future we must forge a sustainable and bipartisan foreign policy that reflects American values and restores our leadership in the world. And NDI is helping us do so -- promoting the American ideal of democracy around the world. Thank you.”