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The W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award: 2002

Prepared Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright

*In Presenting Oswaldo Payá with the
15th Annual W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award
September 30, 2002*

The National Democratic Institute is proud to bestow the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award on Oswaldo Payá and The Varela Project.

The film you have just seen was completed several weeks ago. Since then, we have received reports of widespread repression of Varela Project supporters. Dozens of activists have been assaulted by members of the Communist Party, the local guard, and agents of the Ministry of the Interior. The attackers masquerade as civilians -- not surprising, since the regime masquerades as a people's government.

Nearly two centuries ago, Father Felix Varela said, "A son of Liberty, an American soul, does not know fear." That is our watchword tonight, as we stand in solidarity with Oswaldo Payá and his courageous democrats in Cuba.

It is a tragedy that Oswaldo Payá could not be with us tonight -- not so much for Oswaldo, the most modest of men, but for the Cuban people. But as we have seen repeatedly during the last twenty years, international solidarity -- our solidarity -- can be a beacon to ordinary citizens seeking a path from the darkness.

The Varela Project should galvanize the international community to support this peaceful, legal movement. Tonight, we say to Oswaldo Payá and his colleagues: you are not alone. What you are doing is your right. We hail your ingenuity. We hail your endurance against a barrage of obstacles. And we hail your courage.

I firmly believe that someday, when democratic change has finally come to Cuba, as it surely will, all of us will look back at this moment and say that Oswaldo Payá, his colleagues, and the signers of the Varela Project made a difference.

NDI is proud to honor Oswaldo Payá and The Varela Project. Even more, he and his colleagues honor us.

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