

Remarks at a National Democratic Institute for International Affairs  
Dinner  
September 23, 1999

Thank you very much. If you've been following the news, you probably know I'm a little hoarse, and I know you're a little tired, so you won't have to put up with me for very long here.

But I'm grateful for the chance to be here. I strongly support the NDI. I thank Ken Wollack and Paul Kirk and all the rest of you for the work you do. I thank my friend Senator Kennedy for being the embodiment of the commitment to democracy and freedom and human rights. Mrs. Kirkland, we're glad to see you here tonight, and I was honored to be at the service at Georgetown today.

I want to thank you for giving this award to President Shevardnadze. He has been a friend of the United States and a friend of ours. He has stood for democracy. You heard him tell the story tonight. He's like anybody who has converted; once he converted, he was really stuck as a true believer. He has endured assassination attempts, illegal coup attempts. He has been through ethnic difficulties in his own country. He has been through pressures from the outside and problems from the inside. He has watched the economy go down and things come apart and come back together again. But once he decided he believed, he stayed hitched, and he embodies something that I think we don't think about enough.

We talk a lot about what it takes to establish democracy. But once having established it, there are always people who will try to twist it to their own end, because we may eliminate communism from the world, but we have not eliminated lust for power or greed that leads to corruption or the hatreds and fears in the human heart that lead to the oppression of those who are different from us in race or religion or belong to some other minority group. This man has stayed the course when the price was high, and I thank you for awarding this to him tonight.

I thank you for giving Hillary this award tonight. I'm sorry Monica McWilliams couldn't be here. That's the only problem—a ruptured appendix—I have seen those Irish women unable to overcome almost instantaneously. *[Laughter]*

I was hoping—Hillary just got in today from out of town, and I didn't have a chance to talk to her about what she was going to say tonight. And I was sitting there in my chair, saying, "Gosh, I hope you're going to tell them about those people in that African village." And I hope all my fellow Americans were listening tonight.

I'll tell you, when we walked in that room in Senegal and all those women came with their token men supporters—*[laughter]*—a role with which I am becoming increasingly familiar—*[laughter]*—I'm telling you, it made chills run up and down my spine. And I wish, too, that every American could have seen it because then we would understand what a precious thing a vote is, and we would understand what a precious responsibility the public trust is.

We, in our country, we want democracy for everybody else, but sometimes we forget that it carries responsibilities of citizenship and responsibilities for those of us in representative positions to keep it going. We think we're so strong, nothing can happen to our democracy. But when a man like Yitzhak Rabin is killed, when we see our friends in Northern Ireland in both communities vote for a clear path to the future of peace and reconciliation and then vote for representatives to get the job done and they still can't seem to get it done—we're nowhere near giving up, by the way; George Mitchell is over there working on it right now—but when you see that, it is an agony because you're always afraid somehow, something will happen to twist it awry.

But what Hillary has done with this Vital Voices movement is simply to give voice and power to practical and compassionate women who find real human answers to human problems and who don't let lust for political power in and of itself or fear of those who are different from them or the desire for personal recognition get in the way of their desire to perfect democracy.

What I would like to say to all of you tonight is, when we go to Bosnia or we go to Kosovo to stop ethnic cleansing or we help to train Africans so they can prevent another Rwanda

or Burundi from occurring again, when we labor in America for peace in the Middle East and try to empower ordinary people everywhere, we should remember with humility that we are supposed to behave in our respective positions of citizenship and authority the way those village women did in Senegal, the way the Irish women do in the Vital Voices conference, the way the women did who had the microcredit loans that I have seen my wife visit on the Indian subcontinent or in Southeast Asia or in countless African and Latin American villages. People who have never had it before, you see, when they get it, they know what they want to do.

And we in the United States have a serious responsibility to the rest of the world and to our own people to stand for peace and freedom and democracy and human rights, and to stand for it at home as well as abroad and to never forget that the purpose of power is to liberate the human spirit, not to grasp onto yesterday's arrangements in a fleeting life that no matter how long we hold onto power, will be over all too soon, anyway.

Lane Kirkland was over 75 years old; to me, he was a very young man. We are all just here for a little while. The premise of democracy is, if people are truly empowered to live out their dreams and help other people solve their problems, that will bring more happiness and self-fulfillment than picking a few of us to increase our wealth and power or the power of

our crowd to oppress another. And we need a little humility here along with our devotion to democracy.

We need to remember the travails of a man like President Shevardnadze who puts his life on the line when he shows up for work. And we need to remember the courage of people like those Irish women or those Senegalese women and their hardy male supporters who believe they could change the world if they only had a voice.

I am grateful to you for honoring this President and my wife, who has done more than anyone I know to give those kind of people a voice. But when you leave here, remember that all of us can do that every day, right here.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 p.m. in the ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth Wollack, president, and Paul Kirk, chairman, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Irena Kirkland, widow of Lane Kirkland; President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia, winner of the 1999 W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award; Monica McWilliams, cofounder, Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, and winner of the 1998 award, who was scheduled to present the 1999 award to Hillary Clinton; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland.

## Remarks Announcing the Adoption Bonus Awards *September 24, 1999*

Thank you very much. When we have events here in this room with people who have come to share their experiences, very often I feel like a fifth wheel. I think everything that needs to be said has already been said. *[Laughter]* But I want to begin by thanking Dawn Keane for her wonderful statement; her husband, Steve; and Sean, Brian, and Sarah. They're beautiful children. They did a good job at the microphone, didn't they? *[Laughter]* I want to thank Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya for their work at HHS on this important issue.

I'd like to thank this remarkable bipartisan delegation from the House of Representatives

here, Dave Camp and Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin and Maxine Waters, Sandy Levin and Congressman DeLay. This may be the only issue all six of these people agree on. *[Laughter]* Tom's nodding his head up and down. *[Laughter]*

I'll tell you a funny story; this is a true story. The other day I was reading a profile of Tom DeLay in the newspaper. And I got about halfway through, and he was giving me the devil for something. You know, he's very good at that. *[Laughter]* And he started grinding on my golf game and saying that I didn't count my scores and all this, and I was getting really angry.