

Gdansk, June 24, 2009

Participants of Democracy Awards Ceremony
Washington, D.C.

Dear Friends,

Though I regret not being able to join you in person today, I extend my greetings to the participants of the Democracy Award ceremony organized by the National Endowment for Democracy. It is a privilege for me to address you on the occasion of the acknowledgment of the five leaders of the democratic opposition in Cuba. Such recognition is very important to me, not only because one of the recipients is a labor activist, but also because all of them struggle for Freedom, human rights and democracy – the values, many of us have been fighting for; the values, we shared in our fight for liberation from communist dictatorship in Poland when organizing the Solidarity movement.

Solidarity began nearly thirty years ago as an attempt by workers at the Gdansk shipyard to improve our working conditions and win the right to assembly. Quickly, Solidarity became a political movement, which eventually was able to negotiate and then win the first free and democratic elections held in the communist country. Now, twenty years after those elections, we are still sharing the experience of Solidarity with those who seek freedom and we strongly believe, that Solidarity experience is one of the most important lessons humanity ever learned and that it can be a “know-how” and a sign of hope for those who want to bring freedom and democracy in their own countries.

I am aware that none of the five recipients will be able to attend the Award ceremony today. With these words I would like to pay my personal tribute to them, to Ivan Hernandez Carrillo, an independent labor activist and one of the youth leaders of the civic opposition; Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez", leader of Cuba's civic resistance movement and courageous promoter of non-violent resistance in Cuba; Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia, a youth activist and member of the Christian Liberation Movement who actively served in supporting the Varela Project; Librado Linares, a young intellectual and founder of the Cuban Reflection Movement; Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera, founder and President of the Rosa Parks Women's Movement. I strongly believe that their courage and consequent actions opposing the dictatorship in their own country were mile stones in Cuban fight for human rights and democracy.

I also would like thank the National Endowment for Democracy for recognizing those leaders of the Cuban opposition. It is important that we thank today the people of Cuba who represent a broad spectrum of opinion and activism. All of them represent the future of a free and democratic Cuba. I am sure that their trust in democracy is an important example for the youth in their country. This gesture of the National Endowment for Democracy is of considerable significance for them. I sincerely wish that today's ceremony will also bring us closer to the efforts of the Cuban People in their fight for Freedom.

Sincerely,

