



National Endowment for Democracy: 2005 Democracy Award Presented to Afghans

Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs

Remarks to the National Endowment for Democracy

Washington, DC

July 13, 2005

Thank you Vin, for that introduction. I would like to acknowledge you and Carl for your strong, dynamic leadership at the National Endowment for Democracy. I commend you for all you do. It is an honor to be with you, Senators Clinton, McCain, and Sarbanes, Ambassador Jawad, and our many other distinguished guests. It is humbling to be with those who have worked so hard for the cause of freedom.

We are gathered here in the U.S. Congress, the symbol of American democracy, to celebrate and recognize those who have bravely devoted their lives to the furtherance of liberty and respect for basic human rights. We honor three Afghans, who through their courageous and creative work, have contributed mightily to the architecture of freedom in Afghanistan, which only just a few short years ago seemed so inhospitable to democracy. These freedom fighters are Sakena Yacoobi, Mohammad Nasib, and Sarwar Hussaini.

Throughout time, we have witnessed that freedom's genesis has not been men or women of great celebrity or captains of history. Rather, freedom is the divine product of regular people doing extraordinary things. America's freedom has been the fruit of individuals who rose to the calling of history — often facing the greatest of risks and adversity.

So, too, will it be with the growth of democracy in Afghanistan. There are those in uniform who confront terrorists and tyrants, and there are those who do so as members of civil society. Democracy needs both. We all know that democracy is more than just an election. It also includes the rule of law, checks and balances and accountability, and basic human rights protections, which in turn depend on an educated and empowered populace, a functioning economy and other pillars of a free society. These are needed to sustain representative government.

It is especially fitting that the National Endowment for Democracy has chosen to honor these three remarkable individuals, who have contributed so much to the development of Afghan civil society. Unfazed by those who prophesized defeat, they saw the promise of Afghan freedom, rose to a calling, and effectively advanced its cause. They have provided women and children with healthcare and education. They have spread democratic principals and strengthened local government. They have trained those who will be leaders in communities across Afghanistan. Most significantly, they have demonstrated by example what democracy truly means. Even during the days of Taliban tyranny, when hope itself seemed precious and rare, they remained true to their native land and were dedicated to its resurgence.

Through their work, it is clear that these exceptional individuals recognize that a country's true wealth lies within its very own people. In marking the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush observed that "the prosperity and social vitality...of a people are directly determined by the extent of their liberty. Freedom honors and unleashes human creativity—and creativity determines the strength and wealth of nations." Only in unlocking and harnessing this creative potential can democracy truly flourish, and peace and prosperity take hold. This, in turn, is what preserves that very freedom.

These Afghans have worked steadfastly to do precisely this. Their efforts are creating a stronger civil society in Afghanistan. They carry with them the desire of all to participate in their government and lead prosperous lives. They also hold with them in their hearts the absent voices of millions of Afghans, forever silenced, from the dark decades of war and terror and tyranny. They will create the lasting peace that tragically eluded so many. I have no doubt that these three civil society leaders, their fellow countrymen, and those here and around the globe who share their unwavering commitment to freedom will make this dream a reality at long last.

I would like to read a letter from First Lady Laura Bush, who also wishes to honor you for your extraordinary accomplishments:

The White House

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to applaud Mohammad Nasib, Sarwar Hussaini, and Sakena Yacoobi for receiving the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy. President Bush and I are grateful for their work to support civil society and democracy in Afghanistan.

When I visited Afghanistan earlier this year, I was inspired by the extraordinary courage and determination of Afghan citizens in their struggle to build a free and prosperous nation. Undaunted by the serious challenges that remain, these three individuals represent that spirit of liberty. These awards are symbols of the partnership between Afghans and Americans. Our two countries have grown close these past years, and we are as committed as ever to your success.

I commend each person here for your devotion to freedom. The Endowment and its supporters are instrumental to the advance of liberty around the globe.

President Bush joins me in congratulating the award recipients and sending best wishes to everyone present.

*With warm regards,
Laura Bush*

Congratulations!

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