



International Conference on
**Strengthening Democracy in Asia:
Inclusion, Participation and Rights**

23-24 March, 2015

India International Centre, New Delhi



Report



From left: George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) in cooperation with the World Movement for Democracy (WMD) and the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) organized the International conference on “Strengthening Democracy in Asia: Inclusion, Participation and Rights” on 23-24 March 2015 at the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi. More than 250 participants from India and abroad (20 countries) participated in the conference. His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated the conference. The inaugural session was devoted to the life and works of George Fernandes, the outstanding Trade Union leader of independent India.

In his welcome address, George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences, said “Today is a special day for all of us as we are remembering the legacy of an outstanding leader, who fought for the rights of labourers from his native town of Mangalore in the State of Karnataka and rose to national and international esteem. When George Fernandes became unwell, many friends were keen to organize an event in the national capital to remember George’s legacy. Everyone wanted His Holiness to be the chief guest of this programme. And Tempa Tsering conveyed this message and His Holiness gave the date - 23 March. This day is very special (i) it is the Martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh, national hero of India; (ii) the birth day of socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, and (iii) the day when political Emergency was lifted. We have wonderful memories of His Holiness visiting our Institute on 19 November 2010 and unveiling the portrait of George Fernandes, drawn by Sitt Nyein Aye, Burmese artist. On that occasion, His Holiness delivered the silver jubilee lecture on ‘Human Approach to World Peace’. When I told George Fernandes in 1984 about establishing an institution where intellectuals and activists could meet, he readily encouraged me. Since then all these years George has been a friend, philosopher and guide of the Institute.”

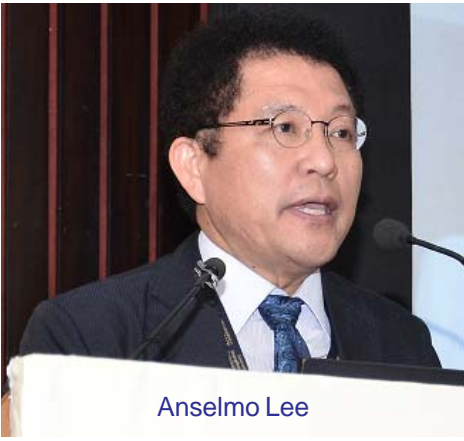
Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), in his address recalled that the conference was themed on the impassioned struggle of George Fernandes for political freedom and socio-economic justice as well as the strengthening of democracy throughout Asia. He also talked about the Dalai Lama appreciating George Fernandes and his struggle better than anyone else and in a lighter vein mentioned a conversation wherein His Holiness saying that he was George Fernandes’ spiritual brother.



Lobsang Sangay

Lobsang Sangay, Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration, highlighted former Defence Minister of India George Fernandes’s long time friendship with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people. “George Fernandes is a rare human being, for he is one who stands true to his beliefs and remained unchanged whether in government or outside of power”, said Sikyong . He recalled how Fernandes personally intervened to help release Tibetans who were kept under custody by police for protesting against a visiting Chinese dignitary in Delhi in the late 1990s. He further added that George Fernandes believes Tibet is not just the issue for the Tibetans alone but has larger impact across South-East Asia given its strategic location and environmental significance of being the source of all the major rivers in the region.

In his introductory remarks, Anselmo Lee (Republic of Korea), Co-Convener, Asia Democracy Network, said that democracy is a universally recognized value. Strengthening democracy in Asia in partnership with the global community is a core principle for ADN, he said. Lee stated that it is very important to revisit the 70 year history of nation building from a democracy perspective. The year



Anselmo Lee



Melinda Quintos de Jesus

2015 is a period of paradigm shift for the development community. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) created in 2000 are coming to an end and the international community revolving around the UN is presently deliberating on what is temporarily called as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Therefore we are having this conference in this historical context and it revolves around the core values of human rights, development and democracy. According to Anselmo, George Fernandes was a very important figure for democracy in Asia.

Melinda Quintos de Jesus (Philippines), former Steering Committee Member, World Movement for Democracy, said that the democratic process calls for both patience and persistence. She further said that “it is imperative to have cross border solidarity, learning about critical issues together, making elections not just free and fair but also providing meaningful choices for national leaders” and went on to stress that it’s not just the protection of human rights that is important but also its defenders.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama began his inaugural address by praising the life and works of George Fernandes. His Holiness said “this is a special gathering. I appreciate how each one of you is committed not only to your own well-being, but to taking care of others. On this special occasion, we remember my old friend George Fernandes, who even after becoming the Defence Minister

continued to maintain a simple, austere and a way of life based on self-reliance. Some of our friends’ attitudes change once they come to exercise power; but not George. He was sympathetic to Tibet and the Tibetan cause right from the start and never missed an opportunity to speak up for them. His face will remain in my heart until I die and I’ll remember him even into my next life.”

His Holiness was all praise for secularism saying it has brought “good results” in India. He said India has a rule of law and its democracy is deep rooted. “Barring a few exceptions, this country is most stable in comparison to others.” Underlining the importance of freedom, he said “freedom is essential for human being as it promotes creativity. It is not only human beings, even animals love freedom.”

The Dalai Lama also advocated people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan, saying “it is very important. It must continue”. According to His Holiness, India should welcome more Chinese students and Buddhist pilgrims to the country. Taking note of “some disturbances on account of political or military leaders for their narrow interests and propaganda”, the Tibetan spiritual leader said “people should continue to have close relationship and that is the way to build trust.” His Holiness also said that “In the struggle between the power of the gun and the power of truth, the power of the gun may be stronger in the short term, but in the long term it is the power of truth that prevails.”



Ash Narain Roy

Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences, proposed the vote of thanks. He described the Dalai Lama as the embodiment of compassion, peace and love as also a source of happiness. Roy mentioned that “though we have the trappings of democracy, in

many countries institutions are without authority.” Roy quoted Larry Diamond as saying how “the advance of freedom across the world is swinging in the wrong direction”. What is worrying is that democracy recession is visible in big swing states. However, Roy was of the view that the deliberations over the two day conference would lead to fruitful engagement and progress.

The two-day conference had various panels. The first panel discussion was on “Strategies to promote democracy among marginalized workers,” organized by the Solidarity Center and presided over by its Director of Asia Regional Programs, Timothy Ryan. The session focused on promoting the rights of the most marginalized workers-child labor, bonded labor, domestic and migrant workers that called for their inclusion in the development of a democratic polity. These most vulnerable workers are often regularly denied basic civil, human and labor rights and excluded from democratic processes in their communities. Promoting their rights empowers these workers to more fully participate in a democratic culture and helps spur institutional democratic practices and traditions as they build their own self governing organizations. The panelists were: Fred Redmond, Board Member, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Manali Shah, SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) and Ramachandra Khuntia, Vice President, Building and Wood Workers International.



The Session on “Strategies to promote Democracy among marginalized workers”.
From L to R: Fred Redmond, Manali Shah, Tim Ryan and Ramachandra Khuntia

The second session on “Urbanization and the challenges of local political leaders in engaging citizens” was organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and was moderated by its Vice President, Shari Bryan. The panel discussion featured ways in which local political leaders are promoting citizens’ voice in the process of addressing urbanization issues in the region’s largest cities. More than half of the mega cities-metropolitan areas with a total population of over 10 million are in Asia. These fast growing urban populations are testing the ability of local governments to meet basic public needs and generate income and employment opportunities. Unless local governments can fulfill the expectations of millions of urban residents by delivering a better quality of life, public confidence in democratic governance may erode. The panelist was Javed Ahmed Chandio, Executive Director, Center for Peace and Civil Society, Pakistan. Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi Manish Sisodia was the guest speaker. He highlighted how in 2011, the people of Delhi got together in their quest for a



The Session on “Urbanization and the Challenges of Local Political Leaders in Engaging Citizens”.
From L to R: Manish Sisodia, Shari Bryan and Javed Ahmed Chandio

movement against corruption which resulted in the creation of a new political party of common people — Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). He stated that AAP is the product of the pain poor people have been enduring in the name of graft by elected officials over a period of time.

The third panel discussion organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI) deliberated on “Adaption and Innovation: Youth approaches in building democratic processes”. Tom Garrett, Vice President for Programs, IRI moderated the discussion. The discussion focused on young people who



The Session on “Adaption and Innovation: Youth approaches in building democratic processes”.
From L to R: Tom Garrett, Ou Ritthy, Reena Khatoon, Shahed Kayes and Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

comprise approximately half of Asia's population that represent a reservoir of change for better governance, more creative solutions to public policy changes and innovative approaches to decision making. Harnessing the potential of youth is essential to ensuring the improvement and success of democratic institutions. It is therefore critical to identify opportunities to facilitate youth to youth engagement on priority issues and cultivate the interests of older cohorts in seeking areas of common ground to build and sustain democratic processes. The panel went on to discuss case studies of innovative youth approaches to building consensus, informing policy and improving representation across the region. The panelists were: Ou Ritthy, founder of Poltitkoffee, Reena Khaton, Programme Manager for YP Foundation, Shahed Kayes, Cultural and Rights Activist, Bangladesh and Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, Communication Coordinator for KawalPemilu.org.

The special session on the first day had Kailash Satyarthi, the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, in conversation with Fred Redmond, Board Member, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). It was moderated by Shawna Bader-Blau, Executive Director, Solidarity Center. Satyarthi in his introductory remarks said that a democratic world or an inclusive society or an inclusive economy would be impossible if hundreds and thousands of children in the world are denied education and used as a source of cheap labour. "If people do not raise their voice against denial of education to children, it shows democracy is weak, it is a sign of failure of democracy", he said. Kailash Satyarthi mentioned that the cash prize he received is still with the Nobel Committee and went on to say that his Nobel Prize Medal has been given to the President of India and is kept in the Rashtrapathi Bhawan (President's House). Thus it belongs to the people of India. Hence it is the responsibility of every Indian to uphold the dignity of children.

Shawna Bader-Blau, a veteran in the field of international development and human rights for over 17 years, asked a critical question: how Satyarthi and Fred Redmond find hope amidst the struggles they face with regard to the cause they fight for.



Special Session on "Dignity of the Child: Freedom and Education". From L to R: Shawna Bader-Blau, Executive Director, Solidarity Center, Kailash Satyarthi, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Fred Redmond, Board Member, National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

Fred Raymond in his address said, “What an honor to share this platform with Kailash Satyarthi, a hero of the child labor movement and the democracy movement.

In 1963, the children of Birmingham, Alabama were attacked by police dogs as they marched peacefully to demand desegregation of public facilities – inspiring the movement for civil rights in the U.S. And in 1978 children all over the world began a global march against child labor, trafficking and exploitation – a march that continues today, under Kailash’s leadership, to inspire the movement for global justice. Inspired by the courage of those children in Birmingham, fifty years ago this month, Dr. Martin Luther King led a group of civil rights protesters on a freedom march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where they were attacked and beaten by police. The televised images of that brutality shocked America and galvanized the movement to give African-Americans the right to vote.

In his speech in Selma recently, President Obama said: “The Americans who crossed this bridge, they were not physically imposing. But they gave courage to millions. They held no elected office. But they led a nation. They marched as Americans who had endured hundreds of years of brutal violence, countless daily indignities -- but they didn’t seek special treatment, just the equal treatment promised to them almost a century before.”

Dr. King’s philosophy of non-violent resistance that was so effective in Selma had its roots here, in India, in the teachings of Gandhi. Indeed, the bridge between the two was Bayard Rustin, a leading civil rights organizer who traveled to India in 1948 to study Gandhi’s movement. Rustin was also the chief organizer of the 1963 march on Washington, and later founded the A. Philip Randolph Institute, named for the famous labor and civil rights leader. So our countries and our peoples are connected by



A section of the audience

a common philosophy and a common history of resistance to oppression.” Fred underlined the role that organized labor – Trade Unions – are playing in the fight for equality and inclusion.

We have been marching together for a long time, and we have to continue marching. But we also have to focus on the institutions and the mechanisms that build inclusion and trust in societies. Today in the United States and around the world, social cohesion is threatened by rising inequality and the economic and social marginalization of large segments of the population. The breakdown of institutions, such as labor unions, that promote equality and opportunity and participation, creates not only a skewed distribution of resources but also a breakdown of trust.

As economic institutions, through collective bargaining and advocating social welfare policies, Trade Unions help to share the wealth of society in a more equitable manner. And as political institutions, Unions can promote inclusion both internally, through democratic participation in leadership elections and contract negotiations – and externally, through mobilization of our members in political campaigns. Indeed, where else can a factory worker or an office clerk learn the skills of running for office, negotiating a collective agreement, and advocating for legislative reforms?

Yet somehow, the notion is perpetuated that Trade Unions are the enemies of the poor – as if the economy were a zero-sum game with only poor workers and better-off workers, or workers in developed and developing countries, competing for finite resources.

Well let’s disabuse ourselves of that notion. In fact, the trade union movement has provided critical support both at home and abroad to movements for democracy and equality.

In Selma we marched for the right to vote. Today in America, an unprecedented campaign is under way to deny millions of citizens the franchise – by imposing onerous registration and identification requirements, limiting voting hours, denying the vote to persons with criminal convictions (even for misdemeanors), and dismantling legal protections against discrimination. These measures disproportionately affect minorities, the young, and senior citizens.

But the labor unions and our allies are fighting back against this campaign of political exclusion, using the courts and mobilizing our members to defend the voting rights of every citizen.

In Selma we marched for the right to decent jobs. Today in America, millions of workers in marginal, low-wage, part time jobs are denied the basic protections of labor law – fair wages and hours, safe workplaces, secure retirement. Many are undocumented immigrants forced to work in the shadows for fear of deportation, or so-called “guest workers” who are tied to their employers. Others are citizens – some from impoverished backgrounds but increasingly those who have fallen out of the middle class as a result of globalization and so-called “free trade” agreements.

Organized labor is using several innovative strategies to defend the rights of these marginalized workers. Campaigns to raise the minimum wage at the state and local level, pressure on Wal-Mart, McDonalds and other low-wage employers that receive huge taxpayer subsidies, and pass comprehensive immigration reform are all issues driven by the unions in alliance with networks of local grassroots NGOs.

American unions are helping workers around the world organize to defend their rights – including child laborers, domestic workers, bonded labor and other – often in coalition with outstanding partners like Kailash. In Liberia, we have worked with the rubber tappers on the Firestone plantation since 2005, helping them form an independent union, negotiate contracts, abolish child labor on the plantation and strengthen the national labor movement in a war-torn nation with few solid democratic institutions.

Sisters and brothers, our march – Gandhi’s march, Mandela’s march, Dr. King’s march, Kailash’s march – is a global march, a march for equality, justice and inclusion, a march of all working people and all believers in democracy. And I am proud to be marching with you.

The special session with the Nobel laureate was followed by dinner hosted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

On the second day, the first session was on ‘Inclusive Economic Development: Promoting Women’s Entrepreneurship in South Asia’ organized by the Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and chaired by Marc Schleifer, Regional Director, Eurasia and South Asia. The premise on which the session was themed basically related to the fact that though women are largely equal participants in the electoral process, the ones from the consolidating and emerging democracies of South Asia face a range of formal and informal barriers that exclude them from full economic and civic participation. It



The Session on “Inclusive Economic Development: Promoting Women’s Entrepreneurship in South Asia”.
From L to R: Marc Schleifer, Rifa Musthapha, Shamama Arab, Rita Bhandary, Manju Kalra Prakash and Selima Ahmed

is necessary to reform economic and political institutions that are skewed against women to allow all citizens to contribute to and benefit from economic and political development. The panel discussion touched on the challenges and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs in South Asia and the linkages among women’s economic empowerment, inclusive growth and democratic strengthening. Panelists were: Selima Ahmed (President of the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Rita Bhandary (President of Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Association Nepal), Rifa Musthapha (Executive Director, Fairway Aviation Academy and F-Air), Manju Kalra Prakash (Executive Director FLO & Assistant Secretary General, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry) and Shamama Arab (Director of Euro Industries).

The second session of the day was on “Resource Extraction, Land Disputes and Marginalized Communities” organized by the Asia Democracy Network and moderated by Corinna Lopa, Regional Coordinator, South East Asian Committee for Advocacy. The discussions centered around how global institutions seek to facilitate investment through reforms that are seemingly counterproductive to development namely socio-economic justice. Natural resources and land are major economic assets for communities to meet their basic needs and rights. However, the so-called development projects by transnational companies, governments as well as individual acquisitions of these resources and land, have negative impact of various forms. The panel discussion detailed such impacts and struggles on marginalized communities in Cambodia, India, Tibet & Sri Lanka. P.V. Rajagopal from the Ekta Parishad, one of the panelists, opined that whatever is deemed to be economically correct may not be ethically



The Session on “Resource Extraction, Land Disputes and Marginalized Communities”.

From L to R: Corinna Lopa, Heng Pheadky, Tsering Tsomo, P.V. Rajagopal, Sherine Xavier and Bhakta Biswakarma

right drawing the applause and appreciation of several participants and delegates. Other panelists were: Sherine Xavier, Executive Director of the Home for Human Rights in Sri Lanka, Heng Pheadky, Deputy Executive Director of the NGO Forum on Cambodia, Tsering Tsomo, Director for the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy and Bhakta Biswakarma, National President, Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare.

The third session of the day and the final session of the conference was on “Right to Information and Freedom of Expression” organized by the Asia Democracy Network and moderated by Henri Tiphange, Chairperson, Forum-Asia. The session discussed in depth the importance of having the right to information and freedom of expression as the backbones of any democratic society. Right to information is essential to enable people to protect their human rights. In most countries in Asia for



The Session on “Right to Information and Freedom of Expression”.

From L to R: Henri Tiphange, Venkatesh Nayak, Wasfia Nazreen, Nirmala Sharma and Tur-Od Lk



Han Dongfang



Henri Tiphange



Richard Gupwell

the last decade these rights have been undermined or restricted under various forms of non transparent policies. The decision making processes have not been transparent in many countries. The panelists were: Tur-Od Lk from Mongolia, Nirmala Sharma, President, Forum of Women Journalists in Nepal, Venkatesh Nayak, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, New Delhi and Wasfia Nazreen, Activist, Bangladesh.

In the Valedictory Session, Han Dongfang, former Steering Committee member of WMD, describing himself as a trade-unionist, spoke on the importance of workers' rights and collective bargaining at the workplace as imperative to the foundations of a successful democracy. Highlighting the conference theme, he laid emphasis on the need for genuine employee engagement within the realm of participatory inclusion.

Henri Tiphange, former Steering Committee Member, Asia Democracy Network, spoke of South Asia as being important for the tenets of democracy in many contexts. Recalling the steering committee meeting of ADN and round table gathering prior to the conference, he talked about the sense of hope that such a conference would instill with regard to the challenges faced by proponents of democracy the world over. He went on to invoke Jayaprakash Narayan and George Fernandes in stating that the country would not have been where it is today if it wasn't for the perseverance exercised by such stalwarts.

Richard Gupwell, Chairman, Jeevika Trust (London) and Vice Chairman, European Institute of Asian Studies, spoke about his long association and friendship with George Fernandes. When Gupwell served as political advisor to the Socialist Party Group in the European Parliament for 20 years from 1976, George Fernandes was a great source of inspiration for him.

Gupwell said "It has been a wonderful conference and in particular I've been so pleased that there has been such a wonderful presence of Tibetans here". He recalled George Fernandes going underground, evading arrest for one year during political emergency and then "nabbed" by the police and putting him in prison. Some of the most eminent socialist leaders in Europe, including Willy Brandt, Chairman of the Socialist International, Bruno Kreisky from Austria and Olaf Palme from Sweden supported by Mario Soares from Portugal, wrote to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi saying let no harm come to this man. Further Gupwell stated that "as a young political advisor he could persuade Socialist Group to get a debate in the European Parliament on the emergency situation in India early 1977".

According to Gupwell, in 1978, George visited the European Commission to discuss economic cooperation between India and the European Economic Community. He also travelled to Luxembourg



Section of the audience. Front row: George Fernandes' brothers
From L to R: Michael Fernandes, Paul Fernandes, Aloysius Fernandes

to meet members of the Socialist Group and thank them for having organized this debate in the European parliament. He was brought by a young official from the embassy of India in Brussels, Lalit Mansingh. “Over the next 30 years, I met George Fernandes very frequently both in Europe and in India. The main influences on George Fernandes’s political thinking were First, Gandhiji, second, Jayaprakash Narayan, third, Ram Manohar Lohia”.

He recalled that George’s great legacy as Railway minister was the building of the Konkan Railway, which runs all the way from Bombay via Goa to Mangalore. The British felt this was an engineering impossibility but, nevertheless, George set it in motion as a great triumph of Indian engineering. He supported technical innovation, but not if it would lead to serious job losses. When there was a proposal that the clay cups, in which tea was served on the trains and on the platforms, should be done away with and replaced by mass produced plastic cups. George opposed it saying that people who would lose their jobs and plastic is not environmentally friendly.

“George was very popular with the armed forces. He visited the troops on the frontline frequently, even staying with them in their tents on the high mountains of the line of control in Kashmir. With the air force, he flew in the jet fighter planes with the pilots. In the navy, he went underwater in the submarines. In my living room, I have a picture of George standing on the deck of an Indian destroyer in the middle of the ocean. He arrived there by helicopter in his Kurta Pajamas and sandals... George was then 70 years old. I think that’s a tribute to how he was quite prepared to be there with the soldiers, with the airmen and with the sailors.

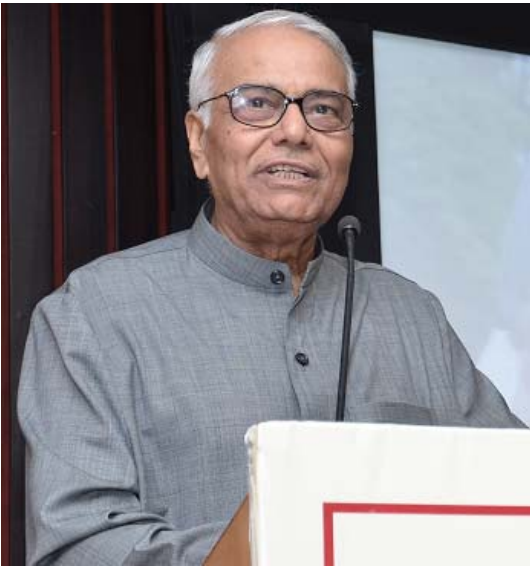
Gupwell concluded by saying “ there is one part of George Fernandes’ Legacy which is missing. What he would have liked to have seen was a strong and united Indian Socialist Party. Unfortunately that is not the case”.

Carl Gershman in his address said: “This has been an extraordinary conference – from the joyful and inspiring opening exchange with the Dalai Lama; to the message from Indian Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi; to the consistently rich conference sessions on subjects as diverse as marginalized workers, local government, youth, women’s entrepreneurship, the defense of land rights, and right to information; to the sustained participation of 150 devoted and enthusiastic activists from all over Asia; to honoring the Indian trade unionist and political leader George Fernandes, whose democratic idealism and solidarity is a model and inspiration for us all.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that he wished we had more Africans at the conference, and Arabs from the Middle East as well. I want to assure him that when the 8th Global Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy meets in Seoul next November 1-4, there will be many Africans and Arabs in attendance... The Seoul meeting will consider ways of reversing what our friend Larry Diamond has called the global “democratic recession,” one manifestation of which - reported by Freedom House - is that in each of the past nine years the number of countries where democracy has declined has been larger than the number where it has made gains. Interestingly, with all the problems in Asia that we have discussed at this conference, and despite the conditions in countries like China, North Korea, Burma and Pakistan, Asia is the only region in the world where democracy has not declined. The problems are actually much more serious in the Middle East and Africa, in Eurasian countries like Russia and Ukraine, and even in Latin America and in the established democracies of the West. How to reverse this decline will be the central theme of the World Movement’s assembly in Seoul.”

Gershman stated that four fundamental challenges will be deliberated upon in Seoul - (1) the political and ideological resurgence of authoritarian regimes as well as democratic governments and international organizations’ commitment to defend civil society and democratic values (2) consider how civil-society activists, political leaders, trade unionists, entrepreneurs, journalists and others can be better prepared to protect fragile new democracies against the danger of backsliding and also guard against extremist movements and intolerant majorities (3) need for the advanced democracies of the West to improve their own economic and political performance for strengthening the liberal world order and counter the efforts by authoritarians and extremists to undermine it, and (4) to protect freedom in cyberspace against the encroachment by authoritarian governments, and to preserve the Internet as a medium for free expression and the advancement of human rights and open societies.

He underlined the fact that “there have been democratic gains in countries like Tunisia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka; and India’s extraordinary and sustained democratic stability is a source of hope for democrats everywhere. But the greatest source of encouragement is the activism and energy throughout the world of activists such as those who has been at this conference. If the global networks connecting such activists can be strengthened, and if democratic leaders and countries can demonstrate greater solidarity for those on the frontlines of democratic struggle in the world, we can reverse the democratic decline and lay the foundation for a new period of democratic progress. This conference has been an inspiring prelude to the forthcoming Seoul meeting”.



Yashwant Sinha

Yashwant Sinha, former Union Minister of External Affairs, was the Chief Guest of the valedictory session. In his valedictory address Yashwant Sinha stated that democracy is a virtue that should not be imposed by external players, even though democratic countries may face their share of struggles. Having more democracy is the key. He focussed on the ongoing situation in the Middle-East where people of the region would show the leading nations how counter-productive their ongoing policies are. Sinha also mentioned that uniform standards towards democracy must be taken at the international level by influential nations and made reference of military dictatorships being granted the status of legitimacy by virtue of the latter acceding to circumstantial needs of leading nations.

Ash Narain Roy proposed a vote of thanks. Summing up the key points at the two-day conference, Roy said that “democracy is a daily plebiscite” and thanks to citizens’ mobilization, governance has moved beyond governments. The nudge and wink posturing to promote democracy is not the right way to go, he said.

The two day programme ended with a farewell dinner hosted by Institute of Social Sciences at the Fountain lawns of the India International Centre. ■



In Solidarity....Let us strengthen democracy



His Holiness the Dalai Lama with Mr. George Fernandes at Dharmasala in August 2009
(Source: The Platinum Commemorative Volume on the 75th Birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama)



His Holiness the Dalai Lama unveiling the portrait of former Defence Minister George Fernandes at the Institute of Social Sciences on 19 November 2010