

Democracy and Human Rights in Asia: One Year After an Empty Chair in Oslo

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In cooperation with Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

Moderator:

Jan Urban, Journalist, Czech Republic

Panel Discussion:

Václav Havel, Former President, Czech Republic

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Spiritual Leader, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Tibet

Bernard Kouchner, Former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, France

Jianli Yang, Dissident, President and Founder, Initiatives for China, USA/China

Shirin Ebadi, Lawyer, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Iran

Stéphane Hessel, Diplomat, Co-drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, France

Jan Urban (Moderator): Welcome to all of us. Today we have a unique opportunity to learn not only about Human Rights and democracy in Asia but about ourselves. We have a very special panel here in Prague, with two Nobel Peace Prize laureates: **Shirin Ebadi** and **His Holiness the Dalai Lama**; we have two more than experienced diplomats: **Stéphane Hessel**, co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and former Foreign Minister of France, **Bernard Kouchner** and we have Professor **Jianli Yang**, a dissident and an organizer of many initiatives for China. I want to thank Charles University and the Faculty of Arts for giving us this wonderful place, my alma mater. I would like to start by asking Oldřich Černý to bring remarks from President Václav Havel.

Oldřich Černý: Good morning. I suppose that I should begin by apologizing profusely for not being Václav Havel. He would have loved to be with us today but, as many of you know, his illness prevents him from attending. However, he dictated a few remarks to me last night and asked me to read them here on his behalf:

Václav Havel: Dear friends! I'm really sorry that, due to a serious illness, I cannot attend this round table on Human Rights in Asia that I and my friend His Holiness the Dalai Lama have convened in Prague. However, allow me a few introductory words.

Recently, I have been feeling that we are entering a rather dangerous period when it comes to the perception of human rights and their defense. I think that one of the great mistakes of politics in the Euro-Atlantic community today is the super-imposing of economic interests over everything else. Attitudes towards different conflicts and problems in today's world are being distorted by the misappropriation of the spiritual values which form the foundation of our society. With this prioritization of economic, material and energy interests, I feel, and again, particularly recently, that human rights and civic freedoms are considered simply the proverbial "cherry on the cake", an embellishment of what really matters, while material growth and development are considered most important. As a result, some things are simply not talked about. Human rights issues, vis-a-vis the ever-growing

economic might of a country like China, are being relativized and economic interests are being deliberately separated from those dealing with basic freedoms. This is very dangerous. This is very dangerous, not only because solidarity with those pursuing freedom in different parts of the world is fading, but dangerous also for the Euro-Atlantic area itself, whose original identity is thus being lost.

There is only one way to fight what I, maybe too alarmingly, see as the beginning of appeasement in the field of human rights. We have to keep an eye on what is happening in China and North Korea, but also in Cuba and Belarus and elsewhere where human rights are being abused. And we must not only keep an eye, but also loudly articulate our indignation and criticism over and over again and use every conceivable occasion to express our support for the dissidents in those countries, for the prisoners of conscience. This may not have an immediate effect, but it serves as a source of hope and encouragement to those who very much need it and this is very, very important.

When we had a Communist totalitarian regime here and were trying to somehow stand up to it, we felt very intensely how important aid from abroad was for us, as well as the support and solidarity of people from various corners of the world who took an interest in our activities. It was a great source of encouragement when we saw that there were many people, often very far away, who felt a similar responsibility for the world as we felt. We have been attempting now, for more than twenty years, to return the solidarity that we received and to express support for all those who are fighting for human rights in Asia and elsewhere. For people like Liu Xiaobo and the likes of him all over the world. His Holiness, Shirin, Stéphane, Bernard, Jianli, Honza, dear audience. Let me once again apologize for not being able to come this morning. Thank you.

Jan Urban, Moderator: Thank you Václav! We would love to have you here but this is as good as it can get. Your Holiness, would you please open this forum with your remarks.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Dear Brothers and Sisters, I am extremely happy to have the opportunity to come to this country. I have already had the chance to meet my dear respected friend, President Havel. We met yesterday. His physical condition is very fragile, but his spirit is very clear, very strong. I told him that the world needs people like him who really carry the human spirit in the face of tremendous pressure and difficulties. Since we know each other very well, I told him: "You MUST live another ten years!"

This meeting is mainly concerned with human rights, freedom and democracy in Asia. We are now in the 21st century which is unlike ancient times when the geographical separations even within one continent made a difference. Something happened somewhere and there might have been no direct effect on your own area. There was not much of a responsibility to show concern about an event in another area.

Today, morally or spiritually speaking, with around seven billion human beings on this planet, we are one human family, where everyone has a moral responsibility to care, to have a sense of responsibility. For example, when the tsunami hit Indonesia, the response from the rest of the world was very strong. That sense of responsibility, to take care of fellow human beings who are suffering. Because of communication, because of economic connections and many things, we are now mentally much closer to each other. That's a very, very positive sign. After all, we are seven billion human beings; we share one home; a blue planet. Just one. If some of you came from Mars or some other planet, then we could make a distinction. But we are all born on this planet and we all depend on this planet. Seven billion human beings: everyone has a desire to achieve a happy life, to overcome difficulties and every one of these seven billion human beings has the same right to achieve that goal. Additionally, we are social animals, entirely dependent on the rest of the community. Taking today's economic conditions and environmental issues, national differences, geographical differences, racial

differences, religious differences are not important. Environmental issues and the global economy are beyond national boundaries. That's today's reality. Now we have to think, we have to be concerned, about the well-being of others.

And so to Asia: the major proportion of these seven billion human beings lives in Asia. Many European countries in the past colonized and exploited many Asian countries. Europeans: the French, the Dutch and mainly the British colonized many Asian and also African and Latin American countries and exploited the wealth of those countries. Morally speaking, you Europeans should now feel a responsibility and be concerned for their well-being – isn't that so? Many of my friends, French, English, German, Spanish really show genuine concern – that must be right.

In Asia, over the last few decades, Japan built a new nation from the ashes of destruction, developed economically and became very stable and peaceful. Similarly India, the most populated country, has also been very peaceful and stable for the last several decades. Of course some problems remain here and there – that's quite understandable – but overall both countries are peaceful. Why have Japan and India remained largely stable for the last several decades? Because of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, transparency, governments' accountability to the people. These are the reasons why for so many decades these countries have remained, despite many problems, calm, peaceful and stable.

Burma and China: unfortunately, in addition to much suffering, there are some unnecessary problems within these countries. Their governments respond with more suppression. As a result, the problem is only suppressed on the surface. However, beneath the surface, the problem is increasing. The people of China, the most populated nation on this planet, are, generally speaking, cultured people, hard-working, and with a long history. As the most populated nation, China has huge potential to make a constructive contribution on a global level. The Chinese economy is already contributing in many parts of Africa. This is good. Many of my friends admire the Chinese people. However at the same time, because of their political system, Chinese people are feared everywhere. Fear brings distrust. Distrust destroys respect. All that is very negative for the people of China. In order to make a significant positive contribution to global affairs, China needs the respect of the rest of the world. Respect very much depends on trust. Trust depends on honesty, truthfulness and transparency. Attributes which the totalitarian system is lacking.

I am not against Socialism or Marxism. I often used to tell people: as far as social and economic theory is concerned, I'm a Marxist. A Buddhist Monk and a student of Buddhist Philosophy, at the same time in socio-economic theory, I'm a Marxist. But totally against Leninism! I'm not a Leninist! I think the Marxist economic theories were very much concerned with equal distribution, they opposed exploitation, whereas capitalism thinks more about profit and creates opportunities for corruption and a gap between the rich and the poor. I love and respect America; I have many friends there, but America, the richest country, has also created a huge gap between rich and poor. The biggest and most powerful economy and the nation that consumes the most has many poor people, a huge wealth gap and an increasing number of billionaires. Poor people still remain poor. In some European countries, you see a smaller gap between the rich and the poor. I was in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. During my public talks, I asked the audience in each of these three countries: "Is the gap between rich and poor small or big?" And they say it is huge. All the audiences consider the income gap to be big. This is sad. We have to think very seriously about how to reduce this gap between rich and poor. And we have to make a serious effort to clean up corruption.

These days I tell my Indian friends: "India, the most populated democracy is a stable country. Wonderful! It has a one-thousand-year history of non-violence. A tradition of respect for each other to live in harmony." Of course, there are some problem pockets here and there. In a population of a billion people, there will always be mischievous people. These days I proudly state that the Indians are

our gurus or teachers. All our Buddhist texts are written by great Indian Buddhist Masters. We are their students. I personally consider myself a messenger of India. I love India, but at the same time, I tell them openly and in a friendly way: “You Indians are religious-minded people. You worship gods, different forms of God, but at the same time you don’t care about corruption – that’s a big contradiction. If you really love God you must live your life honestly, truthfully, justly.” So there are only two choices: either believe in God, worship God or else tolerate more corruption. There is no third way. Many people in India are now seriously concerned about corruption. In today’s People’s Republic of China, there is immense corruption and a huge gap between rich and poor. In India, there is at least freedom of expression and the rule of law. People in China lack these things. When you have power then you are more or less free. In order to develop, in order to realize that great nation’s contribution on the global level, it requires trust and respect from the rest of the world. Taking it the other way, China faces immense corruption and gaps between the rich and the poor. In inland China many people are still very poor. In order to reduce these problems, and China’s Prime Minister has expressed this on several occasions, China needs political reforms. In some cases Prime Ministers have even expressed that China needs a Western style of democracy. China’s Prime Minister himself mentioned that!

In China – as was previously the case in the Soviet Union – people like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, Gorbachev later on; these great leaders with moral principles made a big difference. I feel I must add Yeltsin – ignoring the alcohol – he made a contribution.

Now I think about Liu Xiaobo, the artist Ai Weiwei and some others. There are a number of intellectuals and writers, who see some of the drawbacks with the present system. They express themselves, disturb the government and are then imprisoned.

As I mentioned earlier, that great nation needs change, as the Prime Minister has himself stated. Still, those people, who are struggling for change in China, are suppressed. We need to morally support these people. Here, today, we have some respected, experienced leaders and I’m looking forward to a discussion on how to help those suppressed people in China.

Czech people: you have the experience of the difficulties and stagnation due to the totalitarian system. I had a strange experience. When the Czechoslovakia became free, I received an invitation from President Havel and I came to Prague. Some local newspaper referred to: “Tibet liberated by Chinese Communists”. In no other country has a single reporter referred to Tibet being liberated by the Chinese Communists. At that time, immediately after the change, people were not yet really educated. You have that experience, so naturally you have a moral responsibility to help those people who are still experiencing the difficulties of a certain system. This is not anti-Chinese. No! I’m sure the Chinese Government will immediately lash out at us. But actually we are helping them! There is a Tibetan saying: “If you are a really close friend then you should discover your friend’s drawbacks or mistakes in order to change them, in order to help them become better.” That’s our way, that’s our sense of responsibility. Not to be negative to the Chinese people or towards China. Thank you! That’s all.

Jan Urban: Thank you, Your Holiness. The message I hear is about change and we have here two people with extensive knowledge of change in the fields of democracy and human rights. Could I turn to Bernard Kouchner and ask him, in his political lifetime: “What do you see as change, specifically between the West and Asia, concerning democracy and human rights?”

Bernard Kouchner: Thank you, thank you very much for inviting us. I want first to pay friendship and respect to Václav Havel because in my view and also according to the judgment of history, Václav Havel is a very, very important person. He was certainly the figure of liberation in Central Europe, an activist and he still is a fantastic inspiration.

Now I turn to His Holiness. You cannot attack him. He's in favor of good people, freedom, and human rights. So he's right.

You ask me about change in my life. Firstly in my experience, being an activist was much easier than being a Minister. To the people demonstrating in the streets – and I did it thousands and thousands of times – they have to understand that it is not so easy to change the world, even in your own country. Of course, not only do they have the right to demonstrate, but we need their demonstration to push reform and change. Over forty or fifty years, there has been tremendous change – and for good, not for the worse. The number of wars is diminishing even if, and particularly in Asia, there remain a lot of conflicts.

Not only because of the European Union, but also because of it our continent has completely changed. This is not enough. I know. Following the latest agreement in Brussels two days ago, the people also believe that it's not enough. It's never enough, but from one crisis to another we were able, with our Czech friends, to stay together. They have a particular government, we have a particular government, but the future, the strategy for the future, is much better than before. This is the first time in the history of Europe that for more than sixty years we haven't fought another country. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean anything to young people; they want a job and for them the European Union has already been achieved. This is not true. It is a very slow process. In Asia, particularly in Asia, but also in South America or in Africa, this European adventure is a model. A very difficult model, because the conditions are not the same, but this is a model for nations to unite and not to confront each other all the time.

I must keep it short, so let's turn to Asia. In Asia, as you know, we now have a new god: the market economy. This is the chief perception of a lot of people. Of course we are in favor of an open market – yes we are – but not without regulation, some very necessary regulation. Over the last two to three years, we were anxious and disappointed and we felt that we had no future because of this market economy. Not the economy, not the real economy, but because of people playing money to get more and more money. We are determined to find the way to have a market economy but also to have a more just atmosphere of political behavior and not to be the slaves of funds and bonds. It will be very, very difficult.

People are very strange. They are in favor of a market economy but directed by a unique party. China is the triumph of this model. Money, money, money and the Communist Party. This is a sort of contradiction, but this is the reality. In my country, a lot of people believe that greater absolutism will help the economy and the people. This is absolutely untrue. I completely share His Holiness's opinion: we need more democracy, we need more openness and it will certainly be better for the rest of the people. Like you, Your Holiness, I am not saying that the Chinese don't work. They are working very hard at wealth development and the daily life of the people and conditions are certainly better than they were before – for one half of the country; the rest is in particular difficulty. But things are changing so much. 20 years, 25 years ago, it was impossible to predict that the dollar, the money of reserve, would be highly concentrated in China! This is true and so now they offer to help us with our debts.

The people in China are not completely free and we have to underline that. The civil dissidents that we try to support are people who are brave and courageous enough just sending a message on the internet. We have to support them because it will be in China's interest and in the Government of China's interest. We must not accept that people should be jailed because they expressed their opinion.

His Holiness was talking about Burma: you know well that Burma is a battleground for two big countries, China and India, who are trying to conquer from one side or the other. I won't say that I am a visionary, but I said fifteen years ago that the opening of Burma would not be achieved through

sanctions. On the contrary, when you sanction somebody – and I remember the debate with Shirin Ebadi about sanctions against Iran – it is very difficult to find the limits of those sanctions and the dictatorship is strengthened.

Sanctions didn't work in Burma because we had no trade with Burma. Now things are, I hope, getting better in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi is more or less free; she will participate in the elections. Sri Lanka is more or less better; I won't judge the way it has been done, but I would say that it has avoided a full-scale massacre. Sri Lanka is also more free, yes. In today's peacekeeping missions there, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India are the biggest contributors of UN troops. But China is also, which is almost impossible to believe because China's strategy was always to remain within its borders and not get involved in the "internal problems" of other nations. This is no longer true; there is a little change and so a little more space to push for more.

We cannot just talk about Asia and not salute the effort we are now calling the Arab Spring. This is hugely important. I don't want to pronounce any definitive judgment on that because it will certainly take years and years and decades and decades to settle, but the fact that the people were brave enough to challenge the system and to get rid of their dictators will change the picture of the whole world and I hope it will also change the Israelis' attitude towards the creation of a much-needed Palestinian state.

All the problems are linked. When the Arab Spring dawned, the Chinese leadership felt threatened. They feared the wave would reach China, that the Chinese people would also demonstrate. So we face a globalized world. And at the same time we see the disaster that is happening in Durban. This is a false globalization; the rich are still the rich, the poor are more or less, even if it is getting a bit better, still the victims. Thank you very much.

Jan Urban: We have heard the word China here many times and everybody understands that China is the key. Doctor Jianli Yang, what is China? Is it one China? Is it twenty Chinas? And what is the context? Thank you.

Jianli Yang: It's great to be here. Mr. Chairman, His Holiness, distinguished guests, I feel greatly honored to share a panel with these great men here. And I also feel very honored to speak to an audience, such a great audience, whose Velvet Revolution we admire very much as Chinese activists. As a matter of fact, Charter 08 was conceived in conscious admiration of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 of the 1970's.

Exactly a year ago, I attended the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo to honor my friend and colleague Liu Xiaobo. He was being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his pursuit of democratic reform in China but, sadly, he spent that occasion locked up and alone. His wife Liu Xia was placed under house arrest. Today, a year later, Liu Xiaobo is still imprisoned and his wife is still under house arrest. One cannot help but wonder why. Why is China seemingly increasingly threatened by the power of freedom of a single man like Liu Xiaobo and the freedom of a moderate document like Charter 08? The answer can only be that the rulers of China understand better than anybody else just how unjust and how weak, their system is.

I want to share with you how this system works. We often hear people talk about China's model. China's model is presented to the whole world as an alternative to liberal democracy with a market economy. We often hear people talk about this. We call it State Capitalism, we call it Market Leninism. I want to give you a definition of the Chinese model. I use two Chinas as the structure to tell you what China is. This goes back to 1989 when the widespread movement which stood against government corruption was violently crushed. 1989 created amongst ordinary people a strong sense of fear of political engagement. Any hope of a system of checks and balances was swept away by this

bloodletting. 1989 also created a strong sense of fear and crisis among the party officials within the regime, because the movement had brought unprecedented attention to human rights issues, to the democratic caucus. The rulers' lives were no longer the same. They had to develop new tactics to meet the overwhelming need for stability. Then the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Eastern European bloc fell. This cast an even heavier cloud on the officials of China and people wondered how long the communists would stay in power, but soon they understood the three realities. The first reality is that China's communists staying in power has nothing to do with communist principles; that is, the communists without Communism. The second reality is that economic growth is the best and last hope to keep the ship afloat. The third reality is that the elite must be spoiled to retain their loyalty to the status quo. Corruption was endorsed, was accepted and even demanded. Over the past twenty years, based on these three realities, China established a China called "China Inc.", China Incorporated.

China Incorporated is formed of the following factors. Number 1: Red Capitalists – the party officials turned capitalists. Number 2: Marriage between Power and Capital - taking advantage of the low level of human rights, the low level of environmental protection, of low wages and the banning of collective bargaining power. If you are a capitalist you know that the best place to do business is China because the costs are so low and kept so low by the low level of human rights. Then shares in "China Inc." were opened up to capitalists, both domestic and foreign and to intellectuals, who used to oppose the status quo. They have been gradually co-opted. In today's China, the power of the political elite, the capital of the economic elite and the intellect of the social and cultural elite are bonded together, with corruption as the adhesive forming the alliance to maintain the status quo. They control China Incorporated. They also dominate the public discourse, so that outside observers believe they are China, the whole of China. But that's not true. The truth is that there is another society, which is also called China. This society consists of over one billion Chinese people who are literally the laborers of "China Inc." I call it the under-China.

How do these two Chinas diverge – the gap between the wealthy and the poor – which His Holiness is so concerned about? I will just give you a number: 0.4 per cent of families own seventy per cent of the national wealth. This is the gap between the two Chinas. Number two – the citizens of under-China are citizens only in name. They do not enjoy any constitutional rights and the two Chinas do not share a common political life. Olympic Day, National Day, Shanghai Expo – these are just pastimes for the elite. These events were actually conducted under martial law. Many, many citizens of the under-class were driven out of the big cities when these events took place. The two Chinas do not share a political language. You may ask why and how can China maintain this two Chinas structure? They are using strategies in addition to lies and violence. They have developed new tactics.

To give you a picture, I use an eagle with a head, body, two wings, two claws. The head is a one party system. No matter what, it is the rule of communists without communism. The body is the sustaining of economic growth at all costs to maintain legitimacy. The two wings: one wing appeases the elite with corruption for their loyalty; the other wing suppresses the powerless. Two claws: one claw is purging citizens like Liu Xiaobo and the other claw is blocking information and public opinion.

This structure is bound to collapse. Why? People often overlook two consensuses that exist in China. Number one: China is not a normal country. Number two: China will eventually become a normal country through democratic means. These two consensuses are actually shared not only by the citizens of the under-China but also by "China Inc." Everybody knows democracy is a good thing. China will sooner or later move in that direction but the question is how. People disagree over how to move from an abnormal state to a normal state. Remember how the elite enjoy their wealth. They enjoy a life second-to-none in the world. So they do not want to give up their power and they will do everything in their power to delay the process of democratization. That's where people disagree, but nobody can stop the process, because the civil movement is growing bigger and bigger.

I will just give you two examples. His Holiness mentioned Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei. After Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the Chinese government applied heavy measures against the dissidents, but just after that two very important civil movement activities took place on a scale larger than ever before. One is around Ai Weiwei. The other is around Chen Guangcheng. Many of you may have known about this blind lawyer who was detained and beaten. These two activities together involved many, many more people than a year earlier. Remember that this took place just after the persecution. That means the civil movement in China has the ability to come back. It has a great resilience and remember that the power struggle within the party is fierce under the table and, with the diminishing power and authority of the top leader, the fight will become public. When the inner fight becomes public they will inevitably seek support from the civil movement. That's an opportunity.

I think big scale demonstrations will take place as in 1989, but when they take place we need a group of civil leaders who will play the role that the Civic Forum, led by President Havel, played in the Velvet Revolution 22 years ago. The group established themselves as the voice of the people, disrupted the political order and engaged in negotiations with the state. We need such a group of people; Liu Xiaobo, as a widely-accepted leader, both at home and abroad, will play a unique role in the forming of this group, therefore working towards his freedom is vital to change China. I'm particularly encouraged by many world human rights leaders' supporting Liu Xiaobo; President Havel, His Holiness, Ms Shirin Ebadi. And we remember that Aung San Suu Kyi was released in November last year. Now, for the first time there is hope of reform in Burma; in seeking Liu Xiaobo's release we are hoping and struggling for the same. Thank you very much.

Jan Urban: Thank you. We have Shirin Ebadi with us today. As somebody from Iran, the country that has seen large demonstrations that unfortunately have not yet brought about change, Shirin Ebadi, what is your understanding of the prospects for democracy in Asia and specifically in your country?

Shirin Ebadi: My greetings to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the honorable panelists, ladies and gentlemen. First of all I wish Mr. Havel a speedy recovery and, as His Holiness pointed out, I hope that for at least another ten years, he will be of great service to this country. The world needs intelligent and positive people such as Mr. Havel.

Today we have been talking on the subject of economic progress in China. I would like to give you my own opinion. I have worked as a human rights activist for many years now and I can tell you that human rights are a package which should include civil rights, political rights, economic rights and social rights. All of these are equally important. We cannot say that if we have one of these rights we can relinquish the rest. We cannot say just because we have fed somebody and they are no longer hungry they don't need to have freedom of speech and equal rights. When we speak about human rights we need to look at the entire package. All those who see China as an economic model must bear in mind that the Chinese government is neglecting the other parts of the package. Regarding economic rights in China, as other speakers have already mentioned, there are many people in China who are deprived even of those economic rights. The reason Chinese goods have saturated the world market is because they are very cheap. And why are they so cheap? Because of the low salaries in China. So in effect they are exploiting Chinese labor in order to increase their global market share. This increase in national income does not go to the Chinese people, it just goes to the elite. All of you who buy Chinese goods, please bear in mind that you are helping the exploitation of Chinese laborers. Please do not help to make Chinese workers poorer than they already are.

I would like to say a few words about China's foreign policy. Sadly, Chinese foreign policy is centered around assisting and helping non-democratic countries. Burma, North Korea, and Iran are three examples of countries whose regimes survive thanks to Chinese support. Why do you think

China is supporting non-democratic countries? Because it is plundering the national wealth of these countries. I am going to mention my own country, Iran. Iran is a very rich country. We are a very oil-rich country and we are also rich in other resources. At the same time we have a non-democratic government that has been suppressing its people for many years. This non-democratic country has managed to continue its existence only thanks to Chinese support. Why is China supporting the Iranian government? Because it is plundering our national resources. Iran has offered its most lucrative contracts to China and these contracts are not helping the Iranian people at all, they are all in China's interests. Even our holy book, the Quran – they have offered China to print copies of it. This is while our printing and publishing houses in Iran are lying redundant and the publishers need jobs. China has the biggest contracts in Iran, from printing our holy book to the biggest oil companies and refineries and factories. China is only looking after its own economic interests and is looting the resources of Iran. And why do you think the Iranian government is putting all its resources at the disposal of China? Because it needs China's support in the international sphere, especially the UN Security Council. As you have seen, whenever the United Nations want to endorse a resolution against Iran it meets a veto from China. China doesn't allow the voices of the Iranian people to be heard at the United Nations.

In 1979, the Iranian people staged a revolution and they toppled the monarchy. They managed to depose a Shah who was a dictator. And that dictator ruled our country thanks to the support of the United States, which was also looting our resources. During the 1979 revolution in Iran, the people's slogans were independence and freedom. The revolutionaries at the time were promising the people that we would be independent and would no longer be ruled by the United States and would be in charge of our own political and economic fate. They also made pledges such as we would have greater freedom and there would no longer be censorship. Which is why in 1979, the Iranian people supported the revolution and they toppled the dictator. However, within a short time we all realized what a mistake we had made. We were no longer exploited by the United States but we began to be exploited by China. All that happened was that the United States were replaced with China. We never achieved independence. Nor did we achieve freedom. According to a recent report by the Reporters without Borders organization, Iran has the highest number of journalists in the world behind bars. Iran also has the highest number of juvenile executions in the world, that is the execution of children under the age of 18. This is the kind of government that China is supporting.

Which brings me to the point that I believe it is still premature to use the word "spring" for the Arab Spring, which is how the western media is referring to developments, because it's not enough to topple a dictator. That dictatorship must be replaced with democracy. We also had a revolution in 1979 but we did not achieve democracy. I very much hope that those Arab countries which have staged uprisings will attain democracy. I stress that the one reason why these countries have not attained democracy is because they have the support of China which only thinks of its own interests and is looting their resources. Therefore if there is democracy in China, many countries in the world, such as my own country, will eventually benefit. Thank you.

Jan Urban: Thank you. Stéphane Hessel is my favorite rebel. On one hand, he was with the team that wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and as late as last week he was accused of being the spirit behind the Occupy Wall Street boom. I think that's good for one man.

Stéphane Hessel: *Chers amis Tchèques! J'aurais aimé vous parler en français – c'est une langue que nous aimons tous....* But I think it will be easier for me to be understood by everybody in using that other language, the language of capitalism. No, in fact a very beautiful language and there is a marvelous verse in Shakespeare's "The Tempest" which I want to quote right at the beginning. It says:

"We are the stuff that dreams are made of and our little life is rounded by a sleep". Since I am with you at a very, very old age, my life is surrounded by sleep and soon I will fall into slumber again. But before that, I want to pay a special tribute to the great President Václav Havel. He is not with us here but we are all thinking of him, particularly because he is the emblem for all Europeans: Charter 77, the Velvet Revolution, non-violence and real change.

What we have heard here is that we need non-violence and change in Asia. Change and non-violence! His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is a guide for all of us and when I look at this huge beautiful Prague room with young people sitting everywhere, some old people also, I feel that together we are going to make the necessary change.

I have been invited here of course for only one reason, I'm not an important person at all but I have a very good editor. Two editors, Sylvie Crossman and Jean-Pierre Baru are sitting there and it is their responsibility that 30 pages which we have written together and which seemed to me innocuous have become widespread throughout the world and have told people that they must be indignant. Why must they be indignant? Because our global society faces terrible challenges that can be met only by all of us working together in the spirit of international democracy. What I mean by democracy has been said by all my predecessors. It's always nice to speak after a great Chinese militant, after a great French militant; Bernard Kouchner for me is the spirit of militantism and he was a marvelous person in Kosovo. I must remember that, because that was a very difficult task, but it was a task for the United Nations and we are terribly lucky that the United Nations exists. If it did not exist, if it were left aside, we would lose our only hope of living together.

I come back quickly to the two challenges: one challenge is very obviously felt by everybody. It is the tremendous difference between great wealth and great, great, terrible poverty. People living on two dollars a day and people living on 100 or 200 million dollars a month. And when they have 200 million they say, well that's not bad but I would prefer to have 400 million dollars. My friends in New York from Occupy Wall Street said: "We are the 99 per cent and they are the 1 per cent oligarchy that is making democracy impossible." I don't know whether there are more than 1 per cent of people in power in China, but I am convinced that there are at least 90 per cent of them who are not experiencing democracy. What do we mean by democracy? We mean the people must be helped and not just the privileged. There are privileged in all countries, but sometimes the privileged know that they have to do something for the people and then they work for a democratic country. We have made great progress during the 20th century, let us not forget this. In the last 50 years of the 20th century, more and more democracies have risen in many parts of the world and in Europe particularly; it is great to be in Prague and to think that Europe is now united from west to east, from north to south and trying to work together. When I say trying, I mean it's not always very easy. It's not always done the way we would like it to be done. On that, I must say particularly that governments do not always behave the way they should. They should be more proud, they should be more active, they should be more courageous. They are shy, they are timid, they are run by the financial system. That is very bad. I want them to be less shy, I want them to go ahead and do something for the world's democracy.

We have a second challenge: we, western democracies, do not work the way of our predecessors in the Asian world. I think in particular of the message of His Holiness sitting here among us, giving us his marvelous words. Our predecessors in the Asian world always knew that nature and humanity were one thing living together and that human beings were not free to do anything they wanted to the nature surrounding them. They were careful to respect the humanity and also the non-humanity of nature. We, the West, have been terrible in attacking our pure planet in very, very many ways. Exploiting its resources, giving in to the need for more goods, for more material goods, more energy and now where do we stand? We stand in a world society that will be incapable of living on this small planet if we continue to exploit it and to pollute it the way that we have been doing for centuries.

This second challenge is what we call the challenge of ecology. What does it mean? It means we are interdependent not only as human beings, but as human beings within nature. We must look at that as a common problem and we have an opportunity next year. I look at all of you! Next year there will be the Rio Conference, 20 years after the first Rio Conference, called again by this marvelous organization, which I always support, the United Nations. We owe to them the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I hope that we will be able to owe to them, in the coming year, a new look at the way the world is progressing. What can we do to save the world from being destroyed by humanity? Humanity must behave in a different way, more soberly, less materialistic, more interested in spiritual goals, not just in capitalism and material goals. If we achieve that next year then I will be happy to come back to Prague once more and to wish you all an excellent end of the year, a Happy Christmas, a Happy New Year and strength and hope for Asia and the whole world in 2013. Thank you.

Jan Urban: Thank you very, very much! We have time for a few questions. Please let's make it questions, not large statements.

Audience Question: Your Holiness, I'm Sanjiv Suri. I come originally from India so welcome from my original home to my new home where I have been for 21 years. You referred to the gap between the economically rich and poor, whether this is small or big, and you referred to Marxism. Would you make some comments on the spiritually rich and the spiritually poor and what you think about the gap we have in humanity between these two. And if I may, a very short second question to my alma mater, because my education was for a large part in France. So to the two French ex-diplomats. What is in the nature of politics that most politicians, after they have served their term as politicians, go around the world doing good? Somehow we don't see it in the leadership that is provided by them while they are in office.

Jan Urban: Thank you. Thank you. To the point.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: Basically, we are facing some kind of crisis of moral principles, as I mentioned earlier. You see, many problems essentially are of our own creation due to a lack of moral principles and a lack of a holistic view. However, when we say the moral principle should be based on religious faith, then no matter how great one religious tradition is, it will never be universal. We have to find the moral principle as a secular moral ethics and approach it from a secular perspective, without touching religion. Then it can be universal. What I would like to do is try to promote secular ethics. When I say secularism, I mean according to the Indian concept. For the last thousand years, secularism did not mean a disrespect of religion but rather respect for all religions and also respect for non-believers. India has been for a thousand years something like a multi-religious nation. Therefore pluralism has been above religion there for a thousand years, including non-believers. Respect all religions equally and also respect the non-believer.

The way to promote secular ethics is not through preaching but through education. Our modern education system is very much oriented towards the economic element or material value. It is clear that the existing education system talks very little about moral principle. The basis of moral principle is changing the well-being of the entire sentient being if not at least a sense of concern for the well-being of the whole of humanity. In reality, an individual's future or an individual nation's future is very much related to the rest of the world. For our own interests, we have to take care of the rest of humanity. I had a bit of a discussion this morning with my elder brother Stéphane Hessel. I am now over 76 but when I meet him, I am young. This morning we had the opportunity for some discussion. I mentioned the whole global level is heavily interdependent and the future of humanity is also entirely

dependent on the environment, on a healthy planet. Everything is interdependent so therefore the real basis of moral principle is a sense of concern for the well-being of others. So that and another word: compassion. Compassion does not mean pity, but a sense of concern based on a sense of respect. Usually people consider these things as something of a religious matter which it is not. This is actually something for our future in the family. That sense of respect and sense of concern for the well-being of each family member is the basis for a happy family full of affection and trust. Without that we may be a very rich family but a suspicious one, suspicious even of each other.

How can we develop a happy family without trust? Without trust we end up with suspicion, sometimes jealousy. Therefore on the individual level, the family level, the community level and the global level, the ultimate source of happiness, of a calm mind, is trust. Trust based on a sense of concern for others' well-being. Not just thinking about one's own future. Yes, you have to think about one's own future, but the reality of one's own future depends on the others. So you have to take the same care of others as you take care of yourself. That is secular, true education.

I think we can and we should raise the means to educate future generations from kindergarten on in order to build a healthier society. In order to build honest, truthful individuals.

I am a refugee, but when I meet people, I honestly consider them as human brothers and sisters without differences of faith, of nationality, of race or rich and poor. All these are secondary. On the fundamental level we are the same human being. The way we were born. The way we die. The same. Isn't it? Some call themselves French, some Tibetan, some Chinese, Buddhist, Christian, but on the fundamental level we are all the same human being, there are no differences.

Now genuine compassion is based on the sense of concern for others' well-being. So that is a realistic approach that brings self-confidence. Since you consider others as your genuine human brothers and sisters and the basis of your own future, then there is no room to tell lies, to deceive them, to exploit them, cheat them, because you have to respect them, you have to love them. I think many social illnesses and negative things, murder, stealing..., yes, each is limitless, but then once you see educated people that truly respect another, love another, then all these illnesses can remove the wrong attitude.

Bernard Kouchner: Thank you, you eternal optimist. These are good questions to answer; all are very good questions which means that one doesn't know how to answer, of course. This is exactly – I'm capturing His Holiness' word – interdependence. You cannot talk about humanitarian involvement and political involvement as a contradiction. That's a big mistake. That's why I was really isolated at the beginning when we created Doctors without Borders, because for people and especially for doctors, it was a sort of hippies of medicine, so they called us Doctors without Diploma. Only when we received the Nobel Prize for Peace did they start to take us seriously.

The first answer: I was much happier being a humanitarian activist than being a minister, yes. But without being involved in politics we were limited. Charity is not enough. We have to change the world. I was very, very, very proud of being a minister for Francois Mitterrand at the beginning because we succeeded with our experiment. It was a medical adventure. It was a compassionate and medical adventure. Not to treat the wounded people too late, not to treat the illness too late, but to move to prevention. To shift to prevention, we had to be in politics and that's why we succeeded, sorry to say, but we really succeeded in changing international law in offering resolution to the Security Council. Thanks Stéphane - because without the UN we are completely blind. This is a necessity and the UN is the only one international organization, so we proposed at the beginning the duty to interfere, the law to interfere. Without changing the law regarding human rights, it would still be impossible even to cross a border and to take care of a patient or somebody ill or sick on the other side of the border. These patients, these people, previously belonged to their government and not to universal compassion. We

had to change the law and now it is called the Responsibility to Protect and we did it because we were involved in politics. I didn't change my mind when with Mr. Mitterrand nor, believe me, when with Mr. Sarkozy.

But something else. Very evident. Some of you heard about Jodie Foster last year. Jodie Foster was on the same track, to suppress antipersonnel mines. They had to go to the UN, otherwise it would have been impossible. It is very, very satisfactory to demonstrate in the streets but it's not enough. You have to be able to receive something and eventually to deliver it is very difficult. Look at HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS was a sentence of death at the beginning. We had no treatment. But when we started with some small treatments we convinced people. I was the Minister of Health at that time, and we decided to cross a border to take care of international patients. We have to mitigate politics and humanitarian access. I want politicians to be a bit humanitarian and I want humanitarians not to reject politics, because to do so might be an asset for them, but not for the victims. We need both, this is a bit ridiculous to say so, but it is not an opposition. It was an opposition too much and it is still an opposition and this is a bit ridiculous. When there is a big wave of natural disasters or war, we have to work together and this is dangerous for humanitarian people. It's true. So we have to protect them. But don't believe that when you are a minister it's easy to change firstly your president, secondly the government or thirdly your position. Sometimes you are absolutely fed up.

Jan Urban: I'm afraid we have to end on this. Thank you all for coming. Thanks to Charles University and the Faculty of Arts, thanks to the Forum 2000 Foundation and most of all I want to thank these five wonderful people who are our living testimony to the fact that change is possible. That change is possible if you care. We have mentioned the empty chair for Liu Xiaobo last year in Oslo. Please go out and think what all of us can do to reserve a chair for Liu Xiaobo, perhaps next year in Prague.