

## A Message to the Forum 2000, October 2012

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When I think of Forum 2000 and when I think of the Czech Republic, I cannot help but think of the late President Václav Havel. He was a man I regarded as a true friend, although I never met him and only spoke to him once. But he kept me in his thoughts throughout the years when I was under house arrest and when Burma was struggling for opportunity to enjoy human rights and democratic standards.

Human rights and democracy is a possibility now for our country but we cannot claim to have achieved everything that President Havel would have wished us to achieve, yet. The struggle for human rights and democracy can be seen from very many different angles, but today I would like to talk about it from the angle of the friends that we gained through our struggle.

There are no better friends than those with whom we share the same values; and it is because the late President Václav Havel and we in Burma shared a hunger for democracy and human rights that we became friends across oceans and continents. I have always felt it a great loss that I never met him before he passed away and yet in a sense I can say that he will never pass away from us.

What is this friendship that is based on a common dedication to human rights and democracy? It is a friendship based on a shared belief in the dignity of human beings and the belief and confidence that human beings are capable of making a better world and making themselves better people.

When I was under house arrest, a friend wrote about me. She quoted lines from a poem by W. B. Yeats:

*How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.*

And actually, she left out the last line, perhaps she thought it's not auspicious, but I've included it, because I think the whole adds up to the most moving testament to friendship.

To be loved for one's spirit is to be loved in the best possible way. And to be cherished throughout the years of your hardship as you struggle to live in truth is never to be alone. That is the kind of friend Václav Havel was to us struggling in Burma. He made us feel that we were loved and cherished for our spirit of struggle, for our determination to build our society in the shape that would ensure justice and security and peace and freedom for all our people.

Forum 2000 will do everything it can to realise the dreams of Václav Havel. In this I believe. And this is why I am proud to be a new member of the Forum and to be able to take part in the present proceedings through this video message.

Human rights and democracy add up to a subject that is unended, that will go on until our world comes to an end, because as long as there are human beings, we shall have to keep fighting for our rights. It is in the nature of human beings to realise what our rights are and yet often to lose track of what the rights of others are. Respect for human rights means respect for other's rights as well as the courage to stand up for our own rights. And democracy is a system that enables us best to protect our human rights. And that is why I believe very simply in the sanctity of human rights and democracy and in the friendship of people like Václav Havel who stood up for human rights and democracy as long as he lived.

I hope that all of you who are gathered here today will be inspired by his spirit and by his example, by his life: To go forward in our quest to build the world which is rooted in the respect for human rights and democratic institutions.