



Session II: Resisting Authoritarianism – Saad Edin Ibrahim

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As I was reading the program and the bios I felt very humbled, so even though I spent few years in prison, and I suffered in prison, I lost a great deal of health, yet, reading these bios was very humbling. Suffering of others, many others, around the world, made my suffering look very modest. However, at the root of it all is the same common problem, same common human condition. I heard in the presentation this morning words that, like, never again, and yet, it keep happening. Genocide keep happening, crimes against humanity keep happening. Oppression, suppression, racist acts, keep occurring and unfolding. And therefore, we ought, here, in this very distinguish gatherings of freedom fighters, dissidents, prisoners of conscience, human rights defenders, we ought to see together, how can we work together and whom is going to work with us outside this hall, to truly uphold human rights and human dignity.

As I said, reading the bios and hearing the speakers this morning, they're either victims or prisoners of conscience or human rights defenders. And speaking of human rights defenders, and since I have the floor, I must pay tribute to all of those who stood by me when I was suffering, and I would like to single out the chairman of the first session, Irwin Cotler, who was among my defenders and who wrote probably the best legal brief in my defense. Even though it was so eloquent and so compelling, yet I was still convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. However, in due course, his legal brief found its way through the high court and I was acquitted on appeal and that is why I am here, free, and sharing this forum with you.

I want to just say in the few minutes left in this presentation, that there is a real coalition of autocrats, of authoritarian rulers, around the world. I can't help but be struck by Mr. Mugabe, who was, who lost an election in his own country, and yet, by hooks and crooks, managed to stay in power, repudiated by all the world democracies and all freedom fighters around the world, this very despicable leader of Zimbabwe was received, wined and dined, by President Mubarak in Egypt at Charm-El-Cheih in an African Summit. And I couldn't believe it. How could this happen in my country? And yet, because if your house is made of glass, you can't treat other people otherwise. And Mugabe, Mubarak, Assad, Qaddafi, al-Bashir, these are all brothers. They stand in solidarity with one another. They undermine international law. They undermine, undermine every human right declaration, every human right accord, and they get away with it. How do they get away with it?

We heard this morning the differences to how they call us, how they gang together. If you can, anybody can believe that Libya could be elected chairman of the Human Rights Counsel, it makes, out of the human rights bodies, a mockery. Dictators ganging together,

counting votes, and of course they can do it. They have the African Organization of African Unity votes, they have the organization of Islamic Conference votes, they have the Arab Leagues votes, and, when you add those up, it is a majority of world community. And with that unenlightened majority, they have managed to control all the human rights counsels and continue to victimize people like yourself in this place and many, many millions who do not have the voice, who could not be with us here and who could not at least have their outcries to be heard by someone. So we have to stand together.

I am alarmed, not only by the coalition of the autocrats, but also by the ambivalence and sometimes indifference of the democrats. And here, I want to sound an alarm, blow a whistle. When I heard Hillary Clinton saying that human rights issues will not stand in the way of improving relations between America and China, I cringed. Here is a country that just elected a great president of their own, yet his foreign minister does not seem to hear the suffering of millions of Chinese. Not only that, but few weeks later, she will stand in Charm-El Cheik and refer to our dictator in Egypt as a good friend of her family, Mubarak's good friend of her family. So again, human rights issue will not stand in improving relations between the good friends of her family and the Mubaraks in Egypt. These are the kind of things that encourage dictators and encourage autocrats to continue to do oppression as usual. So we have to stand together and we have to blow the whistle, not only on the dictators, but also on the indifference and the ambivalence of the democrats.

We have a third danger to human rights, and that is the theocrats in the world. We heard this morning our chairperson talking about Iran. Iran, Taliban, Sudan, these are also violators of human rights in the name of religion. So between the autocrats and the theocrats, we, the human rights defenders, we, the genuine democrats, have to stand together and look for new allies to stand with us against overwhelming, overwhelming odds. With these words, I'd like to thank you again and long live freedom.