

Celebrating the End of Totalitarianism in Europe

Address by Hon. David Kilgour
At Letna Park
Prague, Czech Republic

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Prime Minister Topolánek and fellow democrats,

It is an honor to join you all here today in this famous park to celebrate the return of democracy to Central and Eastern Europe.

"Why a Canadian?" some might ask, but it should really be no surprise. Among all the NATO member countries, Canada still holds the highest percentage of citizens who fled two species of totalitarianism in Europe.

The Museum of Terror in neighboring Hungary now documents how within weeks of the Nazis fleeing Budapest at the end of World War II the new Communist occupiers were using the same building for the same vile purposes of torture and murder. Both ideologies have proven remarkably similar in practice in their continuous assaults on human dignity in every land they touched.

Both were unrelieved catastrophes for Czechs and Slovaks and all other peoples they ruled. The record of Communism in Europe between 1944 and 1989 includes:

- The abuse and much worse of tens of millions of innocent people during almost half a century,
 - Continuous economic failure,
 - The persecution of faith communities and the creation of what has been called a "crisis of the soul", little realizing that these groups would play a major role in its eventual downfall,
 - Causing hard-working farmers to give up working fertile soil by forcing them into collectives, which seized both their land and animals,
 - Making it a crime to talk about representative democracy in order to protect incompetent, violent and otherwise criminal dictatorships in Prague and elsewhere.
- Your former President Václav Havel said of the pre-Russian invasion period of the Prague Spring in 1968: "Suddenly you could breathe freely, people could associate freely, fear vanished, taboos were swept away... the mass media once again to do their proper job, self-confidence grew; in short, the ice began to melt and the windows began to open."
- Communism twisted the noble concept of human equality into a shield for the special privileges of party officials, the nomenklatura.

George Orwell penned his most famous line about the betrayal of the people in the Russian Revolution of 1917: "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

- Communism removed all rights of workers' unions, including the right to exist in any meaningful form and to bargain collectively, demonstrating that nowhere where it governs does it care about the rights of workers on May 1st – May Day – or on any other day of the year.

- It destroyed any concept of the rule of law and the independence of judges.
- It turned art and culture into a sterile propaganda, thus forcing many artists and writers into exile.

The now late cellist/conductor/composer Mstislav Rostropovich, who, like many artists and writers, played such an important role in toppling the dictatorship in Russia, put it well: "Conscience is the great motivator of creativity."

Conclusion

We democrats around the world must be neither complacent nor over confident. There are still about 45 dictatorships in the world, which do much harm to human beings and the natural environment.

Consider, for example, the roles the government of China is playing in Sudan/Darfur, Burma/Myanmar, Zimbabwe, North Korea and in undermining democracy across much of Asia and elsewhere.

Look at what that government is doing to its own people, including independent journalists, human rights activists, democrats, religious communities, Uyghurs, Tibetans and many others. Two of us Canadians have concluded to our dismay in our recent report [www.organharvestinvestigation.net] that the government of China is even killing Falun Gong prisoners of conscience without any form of judicial process and selling their vital organs for high prices to transplant tourists from abroad.

It is the government which will host the Olympic Games in August 2008 in Beijing. It is the same city, as we just heard from Ming Zhao now of Dublin, in which during 2001 the administration was torturing Falun Gong practitioners like him - presumably in a different part of the city – and forcing them to work as many as sixteen hours a day producing products illegally for export.

Let us all resolve today in Letna Park to apply the lessons of your Velvet Revolution elsewhere. Your government, your civil society and the ones elsewhere, citizens generally – we owe humanity generally the continued spread of democracy, pluralism and human rights. Human dignity is ultimately indivisible across our shrunken world today.

Thank you.