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**FPA Town Hall
New York Democracy Forum Dinner: Carl Gershman
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Featuring:

Carl Gershman, President National Endowment for Democracy

MR. CARL GERSHMAN: Thank you very much, President Otunbayeva, for those very beautiful and inspirational remarks. You really represent your hope for your region, and in a certain sense, the hope for the world. Last July, Mongolia assumed the chairmanship of the community of democracies. This is a global association of more than 100 countries that work together in many different ways to help strengthen democracy where it is weak or nonexistent, and to strengthen democratic norms within the international system. Tomorrow Mongolia will preside over a meeting of the UN Democracy Caucus, and it is looking for new ways to strengthen democratic cooperation in Asia. There's going to be a lunch meeting tomorrow bringing together Asian democracies to talk about how to strengthen democratic cooperation in Asia, and to use the community to aid countries like Libya and Tunisia that are undergoing difficult democratic transitions.

I can think of no one more fitting to lead this effort than President Tsakhia Elbegdorj of Mongolia. He is the son of a herdsman from a western province of Mongolia, and his foreign policy advisor, before the dinner tonight, Purevsuren, told me that he wanted me to tell you that he's the youngest of eight boys in his family, that he has five of his own children, and that he has adopted 24 children; many of whom were orphans. I've had the pleasure of sitting next to his second son at tonight's dinner, Erdin [phonetic].

Also he has embraced free market and democratic principles. He did so when he was a military journalist in Uviv [phonetic] in Ukraine, during the Glossnoss

[phonetic] period in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. He returned to Mongolia and became a key leader of the demonstration in December, December 10, 1989, in front of the cultural center for youth that sparked Mongolia's democratic revolution.

As one of Mongolia's democratic, Mongolia's founding leaders, as was already noted tonight, he helped draft it's 1992 constitution that guarantees freedom of the press, religion, association, and individual rights. During his long career as a citizen politician, including two terms as Mongolia's prime minister, he has sought to deepen Mongolia's democratic roots, to fight corruption, to reform the country's judicial system, and to improve transparency and equal treatment under law.

His initiative to establish a citizens' hall, which provides citizens a venue to discuss policies and share social and political issues, reflects his understanding of how ordinary citizens need to be part of building a democratic culture. Following the election related violence in the summer of 2008, when Mongolia was on the verge of a grave internal conflict, he diffused the situation by negotiating a peaceful compromise with the ruling people's revolutionary party that helped preserve Mongolia's democracy. There's a lesson in that for Yemen and some other countries in the Middle East today that are undergoing very difficult processes of change and transition.

President Elbegdorj is committed to the principle of democratic solidarity. Under his leadership, Mongolia has responded without hesitation to President Otunbayeva's request for Mongolia to share its democratic experience with Kyrgyzstan. And last March he phoned and wrote a letter to the Burmese Democratic Opposition leader, the Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, offering his support and encouragement. The statement issued by President Elbegdorj on March 16th demonstrates his spirit and commitment, and I would like to read a brief sentence from it.

As we continue to watch the millions of people struggling in the Middle East for greater freedoms, and oppressive regimes fall, I am confident that the strength of the Burmese people to peacefully but forcefully push for democracy that is rightfully theirs, will be realized, and I encourage Burmese leaders to realize that democracy should not be feared but embraced. And that no amount of oppression, or the longstanding violence against the Burmese and ethnic groups, can stand against a people that wants to be free. And just yesterday, in his address to the UN general assembly, President Elbegdorj expressed his full support for Libya's transition, and I quote from his statement, "transition toward democracy, justice, and human rights," and he called upon the international community to condemn the Assad regime in Syria for its inhuman and brutal crackdown on, and I quote, "the courageous people who are craving freedom and justice."

And then he told the world's remaining dictators, and this is a quote, that "love for freedom is the greatest force in this world. No tyranny can resist it forever." This is what he said to the general assembly yesterday.

President Elbegdorj has also indicated that he is ready in his position as the chairman of the community of democracies to lead a delegation of the community to Libya, to help promote international solidarity with the process of democratic transition that is now beginning there. It is now my great pleasure to call upon Noah Latif [phonetic] of the Foreign Policy Association to read a citation, and with me to present to President Elbegdorj the New York Democracy Forum's presidential medal.

MR. NOAH LATIF: For his critical role as a leader of Mongolia's historic democratic revolution in 1989, for his leadership during the following two decades of Mongolia's successful democratic transition, and the consolidation of its new democratic institutions, for his solidarity with his other democrats with Asia and the Middle East, and in other regions of the world where people are struggling for freedom, and for his leadership of the community of democracies through which democratic countries and civil societies are cooperating to advance democracy worldwide, the New York Democracy Forum is proud to present Tsakhia Elbegdorj, president of Mongolia, with the New York Democracy Forum presidential medal. Mr. President, please come up and receive your medal.