

Remarks by former President of Colombia Andres Pastrana accepting the 2014 Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award on behalf of Maria Corina Machado:

Dear friends of IFES,

Helping to strengthen the practices and quality of democracy is at the very core of what we strive for. Empowering electorates with effective electoral mechanisms is a critical component in our daily work. When we are able to help, the results are gratifying for us as an organization and transformative for the countries we are able to assist. Sadly this is a never ending task. Success in one country is often followed by failure in another.

Millions of people are affected by the good decisions and wisdom of few, but millions are also decimated by the perfidy and raw ambition of leaders incapable of focusing on the common good. Frustrating as it may be, our task is noble and we must persevere as history has proven time and time again that democracy is the only system that empowers men to realize their God-given potential.

This year we decided to award the Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award to a woman that has shown exceptional resolve in fighting for democracy against often overwhelming odds. Venezuela, a country known for its oil riches and natural resources exports was once known as a net exporter of democracy.

Today, Venezuela is the bully, the trouble maker, the blackmailer in the neighborhood. This dramatic flip in its outward influences is sadly magnified locally. Now those who fight for democracy, for transparent elections, for accountable government are being cornered by an autocratic government that has proven particularly inept at the job of governing and despicably cruel in the abuse of human rights.

Maria Corina Machado, this year's winner of the Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award, embodies all the traits of a true freedom fighter. She has paid a dear price for her perseverance and courage. When we voted to give her this award she had just been illegally removed from the National Assembly despite having been elected to it with the most votes of any member. Her crime was trying to warn the world about the rapidly deteriorating situation of Venezuela's democracy.

She came to Washington and tried to speak at a special session of the Organization of American States. In one of the most shameful sessions in the Organization's long history, Venezuela's representatives and its allies used every trick in the book to block her from speaking. However, at the end of the day, Maria Corina was able to address the very large press contingent at hand. Her story, the story of suffering for millions of Venezuelans was heard by all. Upon her return to Caracas, she was summarily sacked with

absolute disregard for due process. Since then, the level of persecution has increased and after being accused of a farcical plot to assassinate the President of Venezuela she was banned from leaving the country on another set of trumped up charges. And this, my dear friends, is the reason we have an award ceremony tonight without the winner present.

Maria Corina is a unique recipient of this award. She embodies on the one hand the most noble struggle for freedom, for democracy, for good governance, and on the other she forces us to reflect on all that still needs to be done to ensure that democratic gains are not eroded by the whim of individuals who believe there are no limits to their misdeeds. When courageous people like Maria Corina Machado risk it all, we have to be ready to listen, to accompany them, to make their struggle our struggle. If we fail to do this we might as well close our shop. The defense of democracy cannot be part time or partial. We have to be consistent, we have to be constant, we have to be true to our beliefs. This does not mean victory is assured, but it does mean that we have lived up to our principles.

Maria Corina Machado left a life of professional and social comfort to activate democratic and electoral mechanisms to register public sentiment. The 1994 Recall Referendum was the work of SUMATE, the NGO that she co-founded. They collected 3.5 million signatures in a process the government did its best to sabotage. At the end, President Chávez prevailed in a process that left millions disenchanted and with a real feeling that they had been railroaded by a government willing to use public funds to hold on to power. Since that moment, Maria Corina has been under constant harassment by the government and its subservient judicial system. Maria Corina has not wavered, she has not lowered her voice, nor has she been afraid to speak truth to power and tell the truth to the world. I remember the day she came to my country, Colombia, with a bandaged nose and badly swollen face. A few days before she had been pushed to the ground and kicked in the face in the National Assembly. She had surgery to rebuild her nose and three days later she was speaking bravely in the Colombian Congress about the political situation in her country.

I leave you with a video message Maria Corina has sent to us with her son Enrique Sosa Machado, here today with us. Her courage, determination and her love for her country speak for themselves. I am honored to be part of an organization ready to honor this true symbol of democratic struggle. And I sure hope that our support gives her additional strength and puts the government on notice that we are watching closely and with increasing concern what happens to a democracy under government attack and in grave danger of death in Venezuela.

Thank you.