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Talking Points

Keynote Speech to Honor Two Human Rights Advocates and to
Inaugurate a Center for the Study of Human Rights

Worcester State College

Friday, May 28, 1982

Topic: HUMAN RIGHTS

Point One: Significance of Worcester Ceremony

- Plus of a center devoted to promoting human rights curricula and to working for advancement of human rights concerns.
- Presence of two distinguished human rights advocates: Joshua Rubenstein, New England coordinator of Amnesty International; and Dennis Brutus, South African poet in exile in U.S. and facing deportation proceedings (Brutus bio: born in Rhodesia; outspoken in South Africa against segregated sports; served 1½ years in jail in 1963; authority on African literature; has been teacher at Northwestern and Amherst.)

Point Two: Human Rights Now Ingrained into American Conscience and Law

- Human rights matters are rigorously scrutinized by an alert coterie of American opinion makers...Amnesty International is becoming as much of a household word as the Red Cross or Gallup Poll...Amnesty International founded only 21 years ago, but enjoys wide credibility...organization has three-fold mandate: 1) seeks release of prisoners of conscience worldwide; 2) advocates fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners; and 3) opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases.

e.g. of valuable work of Amnesty International: report exposing rampant political killings in Guatemala despite hazards of collecting such information in that menacing country. In a March 9 report, Amnesty International lists the names of 217 peasants, politicians and religious personnel killed during the last half of 1981 in "extrajudicial killings." Report puts another 1,068 unidentified persons in the same category, adding: "Amnesty International believes that the vast majority of extrajudicial killings in Guatemala are being perpetrated by uniformed and/or plainclothes members of the army and police."

- U.S. laws adopted in past few years mandate watchdog rule for the State Department on human rights:
 - a. Since 1977 the State Department has been issuing annual reports, country by country, on human rights practices as required under an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act...1981 report runs 1,142 pages and covers 158 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.

- b. Also since 1977, the State Department has been issuing quarterly reports on countries that qualify for loans from international financial institutions, to which the U.S. contributes.
- c. Amendment (introduced by Dodd) passed in December requires specific human rights inquiry for Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Haiti and Nicaragua.

Point Three: Human Rights Require Dogged Vigilance

- Reagan Administration obviously assigns a higher priority to tax shelters (c.f. Attorney General Smith) than to human rights, as witnessed by pathetic nomination of Dr. Ernest Lefever a year ago as Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Human Affairs...Lefever would have been essentially an Assistant Secretary for cold-war rhetoric, as he made it apparent he hoped to use human rights as a simple-minded cudgel in an anti-Communist crusade...of late the Administration says it is pursuing a policy of "quiet diplomacy" in a crusade for human rights, but in fact there is no crusade being led from the White House on that issue. Nothing new about quiet diplomacy, anyway. Reagan would prefer to make his human rights diplomacy inaudible.

Point Four: Human Rights Are Smart Politics

- An aggressive, balanced human rights policy is our best advertisement of American ideals and shows the true colors of the Soviets.
- Bad record on human rights hurts in international forum: e.g. Argentina has been hurt in appealing for support on Falklands because of stigma on human rights.

Point Five: Human Rights Violations Still Rampant Throughout the World

- One recent example: Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who was denied the right to accept an honorary degree to have been conferred at Columbia University May 19...Tutu has been eloquent apostle of peaceful solution to South African apartheid as spokesman for the South African Council of Churches and his own Anglican Church. As Columbia President Michael Sovern noted, Tutu is "a beacon of hope and decency" in a deeply troubled land. But in South Africa he enjoys no political rights. His passport was revoked in 1980. South Africa denied request that his passport be returned so he could receive the honor from Columbia.

Point Six: Human Rights Must Be A Two-Way Street

- We must condemn human rights violations when committed by U.S. friends with same vehemence as when they are perpetrated by our foes...
- That is, John Donne never said, "No man is an island entire of itself, unless that man be a pinko or a right-wing troglodyte." Basic tenet of human rights that all violations diminish us all, regardless of motive of perpetrator. Thus, we must denounce the deprivations of Miskito Indians in Nicaragua with same fervor that we denounce the Soviet Union for the internal exile of Sakharov.