

The First Annual Lotus Leadership Awards Luncheon 2011

Remarks from David D. Arnold

President

The Loeb Boathouse Central Park

New York, USA

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I want to personally welcome you all to The Asia Foundation's first annual Lotus Leadership Awards Luncheon. This is an exquisite setting and afternoon, and I'm honored to be standing in front of you. Thank you for joining us.

The Asia Foundation is the leading international development organization operating across the Asia-Pacific region. We were founded in 1954 in San Francisco and have field offices in 18 countries. After 57 years on-the-ground, we now have over 900 people working around the clock in partnership with Asians and Asian organizations, to assist them in creating modern, functioning societies and to make Asia a safer, more peaceful, and more open and just home for the billions of people who live there. We are a trusted partner and friend to Asia and its people.

Our approach and work is unique: More than 70 percent of our local staff are experts in the areas in which we work and their country, and much of our work is conducted in local languages and all programs are carefully tailored to local political, social, and economic contexts.

On a daily basis, our sleeves are rolled up helping brave reformers—public officials, businesspeople, activists, artists, journalists—accomplish their goals for balance, accountability, equality, and empowerment.

But millions of girls and women are still at risk, and without assistance many will be caught in a vicious cycle of illiteracy, poverty, and ill-health. The need is critical and urgent, and we need your help.

Our staff find and support reformers, change agents, and individuals on the cutting edge who can mobilize others to increase women's social, economic, and political opportunities and enhance their status and legal rights. We work with them as partners, and we stay at their side to get things done.

Our Women's Empowerment Program is outstanding, and it's one of the reasons I am proud to be president of The Asia Foundation. The Lotus Circle supports some of our most urgent and innovative Women's Empowerment projects such as:

- after the 2004 tsunami we helped 1,500 poor women in Aceh form credit and saving groups in order to receive micro-loans and technical training to start and grow small businesses;

- in Cambodia we created an innovative, successful, and ongoing program to provide secondary and university scholarships for very poor Khmer girls to reduce their risk of exploitation and trafficking;
- in Bangladesh, we helped women entrepreneurs organize to be able to negotiate with banks to access credit to start and growth their businesses;
- in Nepal, we trained vulnerable women in such non-traditional occupations as motor cycle repair and welding, and helped many of them to start their own business;
- and in Afghanistan, enabled girls to gain an education; and increasing justice for women by working with religious and tribal leaders who constitute the informal justice system where most domestic and local issues are decided.

Funding from the Lotus Circle is crucial because it allows us to respond quickly to needs and opportunities, and gives us the flexibility to pilot innovative projects. With proven pilot projects in hand, we are then able to secure larger funding from public donors and those with greater resources to replicate and scale up our work elsewhere. The Women's Empowerment Program has been strengthened and expanded through the Lotus Circle, and we are extremely grateful for the initiative, vision, and diligence of this extraordinary, visionary community.

I want to personally recognize and thank these remarkable and impressive leaders willing to share their ideas and their resources.

- Gina Lin Chu
- Winnie Feng
- Michael Green
- Adrienne Halper
- Victoria Johnson
- Ida Liu
- Carol Lyden
- Carol Rattray
- Missie Rennie
- Nobuko Sakurai
- Masako Shinn
- Alice Young

Thank you for your commitment and involvement in the empowerment of Asian women and girls; and for organizing this important, timely luncheon.

Together, we are making a real difference in the lives of girls and women across Asia. I hope the rest of you will join us by becoming members of the Lotus Circle.

Lasting, constructive reform is hard. New laws, new policies. New mindsets and accepted notions. Particularly in dictatorial and authoritarian states, real reform is slow, incremental. It

requires thinkers and pioneers, changers who understand that creating space for protection of rights and freedoms first requires shifts in attitude followed by changes in behavior.

Dr. David Ho, scientific director and CEO of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center and the Irene Diamond Professor and Physician at the Rockefeller University, New York, is one of these people.

Dr. Ho fundamentally changed the way the scientific community views HIV/AIDS—and he launched the critical shift in the treatment paradigm to treat the virus early—saving countless lives. In Asia, he played a key role in China’s adoption of new AIDS policies; his work catalyzed China’s acceptance of effective treatment and prevention programs.

In fact, the combination of his research and advocacy in China cleared the way for The Asia Foundation to implement a landmark program to educate thousands of migrant women workers in factories in the industrial South to learn about, for the first time, HIV/AIDS.

Because of his vision, we have been able to educate hundreds of thousands of migrant women workers about the epidemic.

To date, we’ve reached over 900,000 women in over 1,000 factories in more than 22 cities and districts; his impact also contributed to a climate where we could support the creation of safer, more just working environments for women and open up opportunities for them outside the factory to gain more education—or succeed as entrepreneurs.

Of course, these numbers do not include the thousands of children, families, and communities we were also able to positively impact.

Thank you, Dr. Ho, for allowing organizations like ours to do the important, vital work we did.

Dr. Ho is receiving our first annual Lotus Leadership award because we recognize something both extraordinary and familiar in him; something The Asia Foundation was founded on: a conviction, and a commitment, to work locally, to respect and utilize local social, political, and economic contexts to create reform policies and politics.

Dr. Ho did not import foreign notions or ideas; he worked within China’s culture and customs, and he is on the vanguard of protection for women and girls.