

## Speech in support of Free China, 11th February 2006

My name is Elizabeth Szczepanska and I am 54 years old, I am a psychologist by profession, a journalist, an athlete and a human rights activist.

In 1980 I became involved in Solidarity Movement. I represented Solidarity and helped to establish over 100 solidarity union organizations in Silesia. I talked to thousands of people telling them that they had a right to be respected, have life free from fear, and right to express what they think and associate and not to be prosecuted.

I observed long outpouring of love and joy of unity of the Polish society, explosion of dignity of the workers, their peaceful self-restraint and spontaneous social support.

Before Solidarity, the whole Polish nation had a double life, two histories, and two 'languages'. One was a language of lies and propaganda; the second was a language of truth, only spoken at our homes.

Solidarity ended the double life. The end of double life was profound and had major psychological and ethical gains for countless individuals. At last we could speak our minds openly in the workplace as well as behind the closed doors of our homes.

We discovered for certain, that almost everyone around us actually felt much the same way about the communist system as we did. This was a source of tremendous relief.

It was like "coming up for air after living for years under water". Being able to speak the truth in public as well in private was part of that sense of recovered dignity. Solidarity gave us hope, hope and a sense of purpose. It gave us something to live for.

In August 2005, Poles around the world celebrated 25 anniversary of Solidarity Movement. Twenty-five years ago, Solidarity mobilized the Polish nation to achieve unimaginable things and touched everyone that was involved very deeply. Ten million Poles courageously opposed the communism regime in August 1980.

We Poles have a very long and painful history of resistance and anti-totalitarian opposition in defense of human rights. For fifty years prior to Solidarity, the Polish people constantly fought against foreign oppression and communist regime.

This year we have 26th anniversary of martial law in Poland. On 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1981, 10,000 Solidarity activists were arrested, 150 people were killed during demonstration, 7 priests were murdered by secret police. During this period over one million people left Poland to seek refugee in other countries.

As an active member of Solidarity, I was detained on the grounds that the communist government believed that I would not obey the martial law and I would not accept rules of martial law. In additional explanation I was informed that I am a very dangerous person for the communist government because I encouraged people to think and I have a power to influence people's behavior in a negative fashion towards the Communist Party.

When I think about those months of detention I don't think about suffering but about unity, solidarity and freedom. I also think about all who were arrested that night as survivors.

In prison I learned a very valuable lesson that when we overcome fear and bravely faced our perpetrators, we took away their power and control over us.

We remained free and we didn't lose our dignity. I learned that our power is in unity, integration and solidarity. Solidarity won because we were united as workers, students, academics, stood together and said no to the Communist Party that terrorized the Polish nation.

After the severe political oppression I suffered at the hand of the Polish secret police I decided to leave Poland in 1987. I left my home and family with great fear and hope. I took two things which were and still are very important to me:

My three-year old, at the time, daughter Joanna, and the shirt I wore while I was in prison which I am wearing today to show you my support, to express my Solidarity with the Chinese people who are oppressed by their communist government, who are killed because they pray.