

*The J. William Fulbright Prize
for International Understanding
Award Ceremony*

*Václav Havel
President of the Czech Republic
1997 Fulbright Prize Laureate*

October 3, 1997

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Program

Welcome

Philip O. Geier
President, Fulbright Association

Tribute to Václav Havel

The Honorable Madeleine Albright
Secretary of State

Presentation of Fulbright Prize and of "Tribute"

(Sculpture by Sergio Dolfi)

Philip O. Geier
Neville Isdell

Fulbright Prize Address

President Václav Havel
1997 Laureate

Closing

Philip O. Geier

Václav Havel

Born in Prague on October 5, 1936, into the family of a prominent businessman, Václav Havel completed his primary schooling in 1951. His “bourgeois” background limited his educational options, and he worked as a chemical laboratory technician while attending evening classes at a college preparatory school, graduating in 1954.

From 1955 to 1957, he studied at the Economics Faculty of the Czech Technical University in Prague. After finishing his compulsory military service, Václav Havel worked as a stagehand at Prague’s ABC Theater. In 1960, he began work as a stagehand and then later as an assistant director and dramaturge at Prague’s Theater on the Balustrade, where his first plays were produced, including *The Garden Party* (1963), his first major international success.

From 1962 to 1966, Václav Havel studied dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. He was active in the democratization and renewal of culture during the “Prague Spring,” which ended with the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968. He opposed the invasion and resulting hard-line Communist policies.

Václav Havel’s work was banned in Czechoslovakia in 1969. He moved from Prague to the country and concentrated on his writing, also working as a laborer in a brewery. He continued his activities against the Communist regime. In 1975, he wrote an open letter to President Gustav Husák, criticizing the government.

In 1977, Václav Havel became a co-founder and one of the first three spokesmen of the Charter 77 human rights initiative. He was also a member of the committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted. Václav Havel wrote one of his most influential essays, “The Power of the Powerless,” in 1978. From 1978 to 1979, he was under house arrest. He has been incarcerated several times for his beliefs. His longest prison term was from 1979 to 1983. After his release in March 1983, Václav Havel wrote three of his major plays—*Largo Desolato* (1984), *Temptation* (1985), and *Slum Clearance* (1987). As part of his continuing resistance to Communist rule, he also was active in the Czechoslovak samizdat press. He was imprisoned again from January to May, 1989.

In November 1989, Václav Havel became a leader of the Civic Forum opposition movement, which helped bring about the end of Communist rule. On December 29, 1989, he was elected President of Czechoslovakia. The new, freely elected Parliament re-elected him on July 5, 1990, for a two-year term. As President of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, he established new relationships with many world leaders and helped shape Czechoslovakia’s new foreign policy.

Václav Havel resigned from the federal presidency on July 20, 1992, after parliamentary elections foreshadowed the dissolution of the federation. On January 26, 1993, Václav Havel was elected the first President of the Czech Republic.

Václav Havel’s plays have been performed around the world, and his books translated into many languages. Books in English include *Letters to Olga*; *Disturbing the Peace*; *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*; *Selected Plays by Václav Havel*; *Summer Meditations*; and *Towards Civil Society*.

Among his many honors are the Obie Award (USA, 1968, 1970); State Prize for European Literature (Austria, 1968); Prix Plaisir du Théâtre (France, 1981); the Erasmus of Rotterdam Prize (Netherlands, 1986); Olaf Palme Prize (Sweden, 1989); Ordre des Arts et Lettres (France, 1989); the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (1989); Grande Croix de la Légion d’Honneur (France, 1990); Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Medal (USA, 1990); Council of Europe Medal (1990); W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award (USA, 1991); Sonning Prize (Denmark, 1991); Internationaler Karlspreis (Aachen, Germany, 1991); honorary membership in the Royal British Legion (1991); Athinai Prize of the Onassis Foundation (Greece, 1993); Theodor Huess Preis (Germany, 1993); Indira Gandhi Prize (India, 1994); Philadelphia Liberty Medal (USA, 1994); and Order of the Bath (1996). Václav Havel has received honorary academic degrees from universities in Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Israel, Poland, and the United States.

1997 Fulbright Prize Laureate Václav Havel President of the Czech Republic

The Fulbright Prize honors President Havel for his promotion of liberty and human dignity in all countries through his writings, his scholarly achievements, and his political leadership and for his commitment to the power of the intellect and of ideas to achieve mutual understanding in the conduct of international politics.

The J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding

The Fulbright Prize honors the largest and most significant educational exchange program in history, as well as the career and spirit of its creator, the late Senator J. William Fulbright. The prize recognizes and rewards outstanding contributions towards bringing peoples, cultures, or nations to greater understanding of others. Considered for the prize are individuals in any part of the world who have made a substantial contribution to breaking through the barriers which divide humankind.

In establishing the prize, the Fulbright Association and its cooperating American and foreign associates seek to provide substantial recognition to individuals who dedicate their energies to improving international understanding and to encourage new generations to undertake life commitments to international understanding.

*The Fulbright Prize is made possible through a grant by
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