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HEADLINE: Use Solidarity as model for change in undemocratic countries: Walesa

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Former Polish president Lech Walesa on Tuesday urged dissidents in countries still in the grip of dictators to draw inspiration from the Solidarity trade union he helped to found 25 years ago.

"There is no single recipe for resolving the conflicts around the world... but look carefully to see if you find in the example set by Solidarity some elements which could be useful to you," Walesa told a conference on the eve of a huge event in this northern Polish town to mark Solidarity's birth at the end of a massive strike at the Lenin shipyard 25 years ago.

Dozens of dissidents from countries around the world which are still under totalitarian regimes were taking part in the conference in Gdansk as part of the 25th anniversary celebrations for Solidarity.

"I firmly believe that thanks to these debates in Gdansk, where it all started, it will be possible to build a better world and orient your countries towards progress," said Walesa.

Harry Woo, a Chinese dissident who spent 19 years in a labour camp in her native China and now resides in the United States, told AFP that "unfortunately the large majority of Chinese have never even heard of Solidarity."

"There may be some economic freedom in China but the Chinese media remain under the control of the authorities," he said.

Participants at the conference have debated the rights situations in countries from North Korea to Cuba, to Belarus and some Middle Eastern states.

"If Solidarity succeeded in mounting a non-violent revolution, others have every chance of succeeding too, and they could also avoid making the same mistakes as the Polish movement," said **Radek Sikorski**, the executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative non-governmental organisation, which is organising the conference.

The conference was one of many events which have been staged in Poland and

around the world in the run-up to the historic date of August 31, when, in 1980, sacked Gdansk shipyard electrician and strike leader Walesa proclaimed to his fellow strikers, "We have free, independent trade unions".

The creation of Solidarity 25 years ago is credited with having begun unravelling the Iron Curtain which divided Europe into the communist east and free West for more than 40 years following World War II.

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