

NATIONS UNIES



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NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1 December 2008

Excellency,

I attach herewith the press release explaining the significance of the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights, the members of the 2008 selection committee, the criteria for selection and the persons and institutions chosen as winners for this year.

In the words of His Excellency Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly, "these awardees constitute symbols of persistence, valour and tenacity in their resistance to public and private authorities that violate human rights. They constitute a moral force to put an end to systematic human rights violations. In doing so, they are an inspiration to all of us who seek and believe another type of society, another type of political system, another economic model, another world is possible where all persons will be treated as brothers and sisters, without discrimination, exclusion or destruction of life in all its forms."

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman Miranda".

Norman Miranda
Ambassador
Chef de Cabinet

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the
United Nations



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UN PRESS RELEASE

WINNERS OF THE 2008 UNITED NATIONS PRIZE IN FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS ANNOUNCED

(26 November, United Nations, New York) The President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, announced today the winners of the prestigious United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2008: Ms. Louise Arbour, Mr. Ramsey Clark, Dr. Carolyn Gomes, Dr. Denis Mukwege and Human Rights Watch. Mrs. Benazir Bhutto and Sr. Dorothy Stang were awarded the prize posthumously.

This prestigious award is given to individuals and organizations in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Previous recipients have included Nelson Mandela, Amnesty International, Jimmy Carter, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Reverend Dr. Martin L. King.

"As we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we acknowledge the tireless work and invaluable contribution of these individuals and organizations that have fought to see the rights and freedoms embodied in this historic document become a reality for people in all corners of the world," said the General Assembly President.

President d'Escoto continued, "These awardees constitute symbols of persistence, valor and tenacity in their resistance to public and private authorities that violate human rights. They constitute a moral force to put an end to systematic human rights violations. In doing so, they are an inspiration to all of us who seek and believe another type of society, another type of political system, another economic model, another World is possible where all persons will be treated as brothers and sisters, without discrimination, exclusion or destruction of life in all its forms."

The Human Rights Prize is awarded every five years, in accordance with a resolution of the General Assembly that was adopted in 1966. The prize was first awarded on 10 December 1968, the International Year for Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The recipients of the prize were selected by a Committee comprised of the President of the General Assembly (Chairperson), the President of the Economic and Social Council, the President of the Human Rights Council, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council. The decision to name the winners of the 2008 United Nations Human Rights

Prize reflects the criteria of a majority or the whole of the Committee after a profound examination of the work of each of the candidates.

The committee met in New York with the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 21 November 2008 to select the awardees from among 189 nominations received in accordance with the established rules.

The prize will be awarded at the plenary meeting of the General Assembly at United Nations Headquarters in New York on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2008.

The awardees are:

Ms. Louise Arbour, former High Commissioner for Human Rights (2004-2008). Prior to her role as High Commissioner, Ms. Arbour served as the Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and was responsible for the first indictment in history of a sitting head of state, Slobodan Milosevic. She has also served as a judge on the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Ramsey Clark, veteran human rights defender and rule of law advocate, and former Attorney-General of the United States, has been a leading voice for peace and justice at the international level for decades. He played a key role in the civil rights and peace movements in his home country, and in promoting fairness and justice around the globe. He has most recently been recognized for his principled opposition to abuses committed in the name of "counter-terrorism", and his steadfast insistence on respect for human rights and fair judicial process for all persons, in accordance with international standards.

Dr. Carolyn Gomes is the Executive Director (since November 2002) and co-founder of Jamaicans for Justice. Jamaicans for Justice defends the human rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups against all forms of violence, supports victims to seek redress through the judicial system and advocates for their protection. Under Dr. Gomes' leadership, the organization has become the premier human rights advocacy group in Jamaica, developing innovative local and international partnerships to advance the cause of human rights.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) was established in 1978 and has for the last 30 years documented human rights violations across the globe and advocated for the promotion of human rights and freedoms. Each year, Human Rights Watch publishes more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in some 80 countries. The organization has played a key role in major advocacy campaigns, such as for the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and more recently the Coalition to ban cluster munitions.

Dr. Denis Mukwege who co-founded and currently operates the General Referral Hospital of Panzi, in Bukavu, South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more than ten years he has devoted himself to helping women and girl victims of sexual violence in the province, setting up specialized services for their treatment and training

nurses, obstetricians and doctors so that all those who come to the hospital can be helped. An average of ten to twelve women arrive daily at the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu to be treated, many of whom require major surgery. Dr. Mukwege describes the sexual violence in the region as a weapon of war, destroying entire communities.

The committee is also bestowing two special posthumous awards on:

Mrs. Benazir Bhutto, an ardent advocate for democracy and for the human rights of the most vulnerable sections of society, particularly women, children and minority rights. Ms. Bhutto was twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988 and 1993. After returning to Pakistan following years in exile, Ms. Bhutto was assassinated in an attack following a political rally in Rawalpindi in December 2007.

Sr. Dorothy Stang of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who defended the human rights of the poor, landless and indigenous populations of the Anapu region of Brazil for nearly 40 years. She worked tirelessly together with the farmers of the region to help them rebuild their livelihoods, cultivate their land and defend their rights from illegal loggers and ranchers. Sister Stang became a symbol of the fight to preserve the rainforest and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups. She persevered in her mission, despite numerous death threats. Sister Stang was murdered in 2005 in Anapu, Brazil.

A press conference with some of the Human Rights Prize awardees will take place in Room S-226 at UN Headquarters on 10 December (time TBC).

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